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SHAKSPERE:

A CRITICAL STUDY OF

— श्रीकेलाससागरसूरि ज्ञानमन्दिर
HIS MIND AND ART

BY

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PREFACE TO THE THIRD EDITION

IN the present edition I have made such corrections as appeared needful, and have brought my statements on some doubtful points into harmony with the latest results of Shaksperian scholarship

I wish to insist upon the statement made on p 278 that "Julius Cæsar" lies in point of time beside "Hamlet." Both are tragedies of thought rather than of passion, both present in their chief characters, the spectacle of noble natures which fail through some weakness or deficiency rather than through crime, upon Brutus as upon Hamlet a burden is laid which he is not able to bear, neither Brutus nor Hamlet is fitted for action, yet both are called to act in dangerous and difficult affairs "Julius Cæsar" was probably complete before "Hamlet" assumed its latest form, perhaps before "Hamlet" was written Still,—giving the reader a caution as I did in the case of "The Tempest"—I am not unwilling to speak of "Hamlet" as the second of Shakspeare's tragedies "Hamlet" seems to have its roots so deep in Shakspeare's nature, it was so much a subject of special predilection, it is so closely connected with older dramatic work We acquire the same feeling

with reference to "Hamlet" which we have for Goethe's "Faust"—that it has to do with almost the whole of the deeper part of the poet's life up to the date of its creation

After Shakspeare had written these two tragedies, or while he was writing them, he continued to write comedy. But the genial spirit of comedy was deserting him. "Twelfth Night" resumes all the admirable humorous characteristics of the group of comedies which it completes. Then the change comes, "All's Well that Ends Well" is grave and earnest, "Measure for Measure" is dark and bitter. In the first edition of this work I did not venture to attempt an interpretation of "Troilus and Cressida." I now believe this strange and difficult play was a last attempt to continue comedy made when Shakspeare had ceased to be able to smile genially, and when he must be either ironical, or else take a deep, passionate and tragical view of life.

I have elsewhere written as follows

"*Troilus and Cressida* appeared in two quarto editions in the year 1609, in the title page of the earlier of the two it is stated to have been acted at the Globe, the later contains a singular preface in which the play is spoken of as 'never stal'd with the stage, never clapper-claw'd with the palmes of the vulgar,' and as having been published against the will of 'the grand possessors.' Perhaps the play was printed at first for the use of the theatre, and with the intention of being published after being represented, and that the printers, against the known wish of the proprietors of Shakspeare's manuscript, anticipated the first representation and issued the Quarto with the attractive announcement that it was an absolute novelty. The editors of the Folio, after having decided that *Troilus and Cressida* should follow *Romeo and Juliet* among the Tragedies, changed their minds, apparently uncertain how the play

should be classed, and placed it between the Histories and Tragedies, thus led to the cancelling of a leaf, and the filling up of a blank space left by the alteration, with the Prologue to *Troilus and Cressida*—a prologue which is believed by several critics not to have come from Shakspeare's hand

“There is extreme uncertainty with respect to the date of the play Dekker and Chettilé were engaged in 1599 upon a play on this subject, and from an entry in the Stationers' Register on 7th Feb 1602-3 it appears that a *Troilus and Cressida* had been acted by Shakspeare's company, the Lord Chamberlain's Servants. Was this Shakspeare's play? We are thrown back upon internal evidence to decide the question, and the internal evidence is itself of a conflicting kind, and has led to opposite conclusions. The massive worldly wisdom of Ulysses argues it is supposed in favour of a late date, and the general tone of the play has been compared with that of *Timon of Athens*. The fact that it does not contain a single weak-ending and only six light-endings is however almost decisive evidence against our placing it after either *Timon* or *Macbeth*, and the other metrical characteristics are considered, by Hertzberg, the most careful student of this class of evidence in the case of the present play, to point to a date about 1603. Other authorities place it as late as 1608 or 1609, while a third theory (that of Verplanck and Grant White) attempts to solve the difficulties by supposing that it was first written in 1603 and revised and enlarged shortly before the publication of the quarto. Parts of the play—notably the last battle of Hector—appear not to be by Shakspeare. The interpretation of the play itself is as difficult as the ascertainment of the external facts of its history. With what intention, and in what spirit did Shakspeare write this strange comedy? All the Greek heroes who fought against Troy are pitilessly exposed to ridicule, Helen and Cressida are light, sensual and heartless, for whose sake it seems infatuated folly to strike a blow, Troilus is an enthusiastic young fool, and even Hector, though valiant and generous, spends his life in a cause which he knows to be unprofitable if not evil. All this is seen and said by Thersites, whose mind is made up of the scum of the foulness of human life. But can Shakspeare's view of things have been the same as that of Thersites?

“The central theme, the young love and faith of Troilus given to one who was false and fickle, and his discovery of his error, lends its colour to the whole play. It is the comedy of disillusion. And as Troilus passed through the illusion of his first love for

woman, so by middle life the world itself often appears like one that has not kept her promises, and who is a poor deceiver. We come to see the seamy side of life, and from this mood of disillusion it is a deliverance to pass on even to a dark and tragic view of life, to which beauty and virtue reappear even though human weakness or human vice may do them bitter wrong. Now such a mood of contemptuous depreciation of life may have come over Shakspeare, and spoilt him, at that time, for a writer of comedy. But for *Isabella* we should find the coming on of this mood in *Measure for Measure*, there is perhaps a touch of it in *Hamlet*. At this time *Troilus and Cressida* may have been written, and then Shakspeare rousing himself to a deeper inquest into things may have passed on to his great series of tragedies.

"Let us call this then the comedy of disillusion, and certainly wherever we place it we must notice a striking resemblance in its spirit and structure to *Timon of Athens*. Timon has a lax benevolence and shallow trust in the goodness of men, he is undeceived and bitterly turns away from the whole human race in a rage of disappointment. In the same play Alcibiades is in like manner wronged by the world, but he takes his injuries firmly like a man of action and experience and sets about the subduing of his base antagonists. Apemantus again is the dog-like reviler of men, knowing their baseness and base himself. Here, Troilus, the noble green-goose, goes through his youthful agony of ascertaining the unworthiness of her to whom he had given his faith and hope, but he is made of a stronger and more energetic fibre than Timon, and he comes out of his trial a man, no longer a boy, somewhat harder perhaps than before, but strung up for sustained and determined action. He is completely delivered from Cressida and from Pandar, and by Hector's death supplied with a motive for the utmost exertion of his heroic powers. Ulysses,—the antithesis of Troilus,—is the much-experienced man of the world, possessed of its highest and broadest wisdom, which yet always remains worldly wisdom and never rises into the spiritual contemplation of a Prospero. He sees all the unworthiness of human life, but will use it for high worldly ends, the spirit of irreverence and insubordination in the camp he would restrain by the politic machinery of what he calls 'degree'—I 1 75-136. Cressida he reads at a glance, seeing to the bottom of her sensual shallow nature, and he assists at the disillusioning of the young Prince, whose nobleness is apparent to him from the first. Thersites also sees through the illusions of the world, but his very incapacity to

have ever been deceived is a sign of the ignoble nature of the wretch. He feeds and grows strong upon garbage, physical nastinesses and moral sores are the luxuries of his imagination. The other characters, the brute warrior Ajax, the insolent self-worshipper Achilles, Hector, heroic but too careless how and when he expends his heroic strength, are of minor importance. As the blindness of youthful love is shown in Troilus, so old age in its least venerable form, given up to a gratification of sensuality by proxy, is exposed to derision in Pandar. The materials for Troilus and Cressida were found by Shakspeare in Chaucer's *Troilus and Cressida*, Caxton's translation from the French, *Recuyles, or Destruction of Troy*, perhaps also Lydgate's *Troye Boke*. Thersites, he probably found in Book II of Chapman's *Homer*. Shakspeare's conception of Cressida and of Pandar differs widely from Chaucer's, in Shakspeare's hands in accordance with the general design of the drama, Cressida and her uncle grow base and contemptible. Some critics have supposed that the love-story was written at a much earlier date than the part which treats of Ulysses, but we have seen that the contrasted characters of Troilus and Ulysses are both essential parts of the conception of the drama, and were created as counterparts."

The following table presents the plays in a series of groups which succeed one another in chronological order. The position of three or four plays of secondary importance may be doubtful, and I claim no certainty for the order of the plays within the groups, but I offer the arrangement of groups with great confidence as to its general correctness. It will be observed that in some cases one group overlaps in point of time that which follows it. To keep the comedies together I have placed "~~Middle~~ Tragedy" after the third division of what I have named "Later Comedy," it will suffice if the reader bear in mind that as a fact the comedy overlaps the succeeding group of tragedies.

1 PRE-SHAKSPERIAN GROUP
(Touched by Shakspeare)
 Titus Andronicus (1588-90)
 1 Henry VI (1590-91)

2 EARLY COMEDY
 Love's Labour's Lost (1590)
 Comedy of Errors (1591)
 Two Gentlemen of Verona
 (1592-93)
 Midsummer Night's Dream
 (1593-94)

3 MARLOWE-SHAKSPERE
 GROUP

EARLY HISTORY
 2 & 3 Henry VI. (1591-92)
 Richard III. (1593)

4. EARLY TRAGEDY
 Romeo and Juliet (? two dates,
 1591, 1597)

5 MIDDLE HISTORY
 Richard II. (1594)
 King John (1595)

6 MIDDLE COMEDY
 Merchant of Venice (1596)

7 LATER HISTORY
History and Comedy united
 1 & 2 Henry IV (1597-98)
 Henry V (1599)

8 LATER COMEDY.
(a) Rough and boisterous comedy
 Taming of the Shrew (? 1597)
 Merry Wives (? 1598)

(b) Joyous, refined, romantic
 Much Ado about Nothing (1598)
 As You Like It (1599)
 Twelfth Night (1600-01)

(c) Serious, dark, ironical.
 All's Well (? 1601-02)
 Measure for Measure (1603)
 Troilus and Cressida (? 1603,
 revised 1607?)

9 MIDDLE TRAGEDY
 Julius Caesar (1601)
 Hamlet (1602)

10 LATER TRAGEDY
 Othello (1604)
 Lear (1605)
 Macbeth (1606)
 Antony and Cleopatra (1607)
 Coriolanus (1608)
 Timon (1607-08)

11 ROMANCES
 Pericles (1608)
 Cymbeline (1609)
 Tempest (1610)
 Winter's Tale (1610-11)

12 FRAGMENTS
 Two Noble Kinsmen (1612)
 Henry VIII. (1612-13)

POEMS
 Venus and Adonis (? 1592)
 Lucrece (1593-4)
 Sonnets (? 1595-1605)

"The student will observe in this arrangement, early, middle, and later Comedy, early, middle, and later History, and early, middle, and later Tragedy. Not only is it well to view the entire body of Shakspeare's

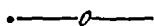
plays in the order of their chronological succession, but also to trace in chronological order the three separate lines of Comedy, History, and Tragedy. The group named Romances connect themselves, of course, with the Comedies, but there is a grave element in them which is connected with the Tragedies which preceded them. It has been noticed that the Romances have in common the incidents of reunions, reconciliations, and the recovery of lost children. Shakspeare, though so remarkable for his power of creating character, is not distinguished among dramatists for his power of inventing incident. Having found a situation which interested his imagination, or was successful on the stage, he introduced it again and again, with variations. Thus, in the Early Comedies, mistakes of identity, disguises, errors, and bewilderments, in various forms, recur as a source of merriment and material for adventure. In the Later Comedies, again, it is quite remarkable how Shakspeare (generally in the portions of these plays which are due to his own invention) repeats, with variations, the incident of a trick or fraud practised upon one who is a self-lover, and its consequences, grave or gay. Thus Falstaff is fatuous enough to believe that two English matrons are dying of love for him, and is made the victim of their merry tricks. Malvolio is made an ass of by the mischievous Maria taking advantage of his solemn self-esteem, Beatrice and Benedick are cunningly entrapped, through their good-natured vanity, into love for which they had been already predisposed,

the boastful Parolles is deceived, flouted, and disgraced by his fellow-soldiers, and (Shakspeare's mood growing earnest, and his thoughts being set upon deep questions of character) Angelo, the self-deceiver, by the craft of the Duke, is discovered painfully to the eyes of others and to his own heart "

For the index which adds to the usefulness of the present edition I have to thank my friend Mr Arthur E Love of Trinity College, Dublin .

It has been a happiness to me to find that what I have written on Shakspeare has been approved by distinguished Shakspeare scholars in England, in Germany, in France, and in America . I do not thank my critics for their generous recognition of whatever may deserve commendation in my work , I may, however, at least express the sense of encouragement derived from what they have said . One of the earliest voices which spoke a word of emphatic approval of this book is now silent in death, and I cannot but desire to associate, at least, by my grateful recollection, this Study of Shakspeare with the honoured name of its reviewer in *The Academy*, the late Mr Richard Simpson.

PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION



THE attempt made in this volume to connect the study of Shakspeare's works with an inquiry after the personality of the writer, and to observe, as far as is possible, in its several stages the growth of his intellect and character from youth to full maturity, distinguishes the work from the greater number of preceding criticisms of Shakspeare. A sense of hazard and difficulty necessarily accompanies the attempt to pass through the creations of a great dramatic poet to the mind of the creator. Still no one, I suppose, would maintain that a product of mind, so large and manifold as the writings of Shakspeare, can fail in some measure to reveal its origin and cause.

The reader must not fall into the error of supposing that I endeavour to identify Shakspeare with any one of his dramatic personages. The complex nature of the poet contained a love-idealist like Romeo—(students of the Sonnets will not find it difficult to admit the possibility of this), ~~it~~ contained a speculative intellect like that of Hamlet. But the complete Shakspeare was unlike Romeo, and unlike Hamlet. Still it is evident not from one play, but from many, that the struggle between "blood" and "judgment" was a great affair of

Shakspeare's life, and in all his later works we observe the effort to control a wistful curiosity about the mysteries of human existence. And therefore, I say, a potential Romeo, and a potential Hamlet, taking these names as representative of certain spiritual tendencies or habits, existed in Shakspeare. Nor do I identify Shakspeare with Prospero; although Shakspeare's temper in the plays of the last period is the temper of Prospero. It would not be easy to picture to ourselves the great magician waited on by such ministering spirits as Sir John Falstaff, Sir Toby Belch, and the Nurse of Juliet.

In order to get substantial ground to go upon I have thought it necessary to form acquaintance with a considerable body of recent Shakspeare scholarship, both English and continental. But I avoid the discussion of purely scholastic questions. To approach Shakspeare on the human side is the object of this book; but I believe that Shakspeare is not to be approached on any side through dilettantism.

I have carefully acknowledged my obligations to preceding writers. In working out the general design and main features of this study, I was able to obtain little help, but in details I obtained much. My references express, I may say, considerably more than my actual debt, for in those instances in which I found that my thought had been anticipated, and well expressed elsewhere, I have noted the coincidence. Doubtless many instances of such coincidence remain unobserved by me. Since I wrote the chapter in which "The Tempest" is considered, I have read for the first time Lloyd's essay upon

the play, and I have found some striking and satisfactory points of agreement between myself and that good critic

In all essentials I have adhered to the chronological method of studying Shakspeare's writings. But it seemed pedantry to sacrifice certain advantages of contrast and comparison to a procedure in every instance, from play to play, according to dates. Thus, in the chapter on the English Historical Plays I have, for convenience of illustration, treated Henry VI after King John and before Richard III. In the opening of the eighth chapter I have explained what I believe to be the right manner of using the chronological method. I have called "The Tempest" Shakspeare's last play, but I am quite willing to grant that "A Winter's Tale," "Henry VIII." and perhaps "Cymbeline," may actually have succeeded "The Tempest." For the purpose of such a study as the present, if it be admitted that these plays belong to one and the same period,—the final period of the growth of Shakspeare's art,—it matters little how the plays succeeded one another within that period.

I refer in one passage to Henry VIII, *Act iv, Scene 2*, as if written by Shakspeare. The scene was, I believe, conceived by Shakspeare, and carried out in the spirit of his design by Fletcher.

About half of this volume was read in the form of lectures ("Saturday Lectures in connection with Alexandra College, Dublin"), in the Museum Buildings, Trinity College, Dublin, during the spring of the year 1874.

In some instances I have referred to, and quoted from papers by the Rev F G Fleay as read at meetings of

"The New Shakspeare Society," but which have not received the final corrections of their author.

In seeing the volume through the press, I received valuable suggestions and corrections from Mr Harold Littledale, the editor, for "The New Shakspeare Society," of "The Two Noble Kinsmen," for which I thank him.

I have to thank the Director of "The New Shakspeare Society," Mr F. J. Furnivall, for permission to print the "Trial Table of the order of Shakspeare's Plays," which appears in his introduction to the new edition of Shakespeare Commentaries by Gervinus

TRIAL TABLE OF THE ORDER OF SHAKSPEARE'S PLAYS

[This, like all other tables, must be looked on as merely tentative, and open to modification for any good reasons. But if only it comes near the truth, then reading the plays in its order will the sooner enable the student to find out its mistakes (M stands for "mentioned by Francis Meres in his *Palladis Tamia*, 1598")]

In his Introductory Essays to *Shakespeare's Dramatische Werke* (German Shakespeare Society) Prof Hertzberg dates *Titus* 1587-9, *Love's Labour's Lost*, 1592, *Comedy of Errors* about New Year's Day 1591, *Two Gentlemen* 1592, *All's Well* 1603, *Troilus and Cressida* 1603, and *Cymbeline* 1611

	Supposed Date.	Earliest Allusion.	Date of Publication.
FIRST PERIOD			
Venus and Adonis	1585-7		1593
Titus Andronicus toucht up	(?) 1588	1594 M	[(?) 1594] 1600
Love's Labour's Lost	1588-9	1598 M	1598 (amended)
[Love's Labour's Wonne		1598 M	
Comedy of Errors	1588 91	1598 M	1623
Midsummer Night's Dream	1590-1	1598 M	1600
(? two dates)	1590-2	1598 M	1623
Two Gentlemen of Verona	(?) 1590 2	1594	1623
(?) 1 Henry VI toucht up		1594	
(?) Troilus and Cressida, begun		1594	
(?) Lucrece	(?) 1591-3	1595 M	1594
Romeo and Juliet			1597
(?) A Lover's Complaint	1593 4	? 1595 M	1597
Richard II	1594	? 1595 M	1597
Richard III	(?) 1594-5		1623
2 & 3 Henry VI re-cast	1595	1598 M	1623
John			

TRIAL TABLE OF THE ORDER OF SHAKSPERE'S PLAYS—*Continued.*

	Supposed Date	Earliest Allusion	Date of Publication
SECOND PERIOD			
Merchant of Venice	(?) 1596	1598 M	1600†
Taming of the Shrew, part	(?) 1596 7		1623*
1 Henry IV	1596-7†	1598 M	1598
2 Henry IV	1597-8†	1598 M	1600
Merry Wives	1598-9	1602	1602
Henry V	1599†	1599	1600
Much Ado	1599-1600†	1600	1600
As you Like it	1600†	1600	1623§
Twelfth Night	1601†	1602	1623
All's Well (? L's. L. Wonne re-cast)	1601-2		1623
Sonnets	(?) 1592-1602	1598 M	1609
THIRD PERIOD			
Hamlet	1602-3†	(?)	1603*
Measure for Measure	(?) 1603		1623
Julius Caesar	(?) 1601 3	(?)	1623
Othello	(?) 1604	1610	1622
Macbeth	1605-6†	1610	1623
Lear	1605 6†	1606	1608*
Troilus & Cressida (?) completed	1606 7	1609	1609
Antony and Cleopatra	1606-7	1608 (?)	1623
Coriolanus	(?) 1607-8		1623
Timon, part	1607-8		1623
FOURTH PERIOD			
Pericles, part	1608†	1608	1609*
Two Noble Kinsmen	1609		1634
Tempest	1610	? 1614	1623
Cymbeline	1610 12		1623
Winter's Tale	(?) 1611	1611	1623
Henry VIII, part	1613†	1613 (?)	1623

* Entered 1 year before at Stationers' Hall.

† Entered 2 years before at Stationers' Hall.

‡ May be looked-on as fairly certain.

§ Entered in the Stationers' Registers in 1600

|| 'The Taming of a Shrew' was published in 1594

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Shakspère—His Mind and Art.

CHAPTER I.

—ERE AND THE ELIZABETHAN AGE

IN these chapters an attempt will be made to present a view or aspect of a great poet, and the first word must explain precisely what such a view or aspect is worth, what it professes to be, and what it disclaims. Dr Newman, in his "Grammar of Assent," has distinguished two modes of apprehending propositions. There is what he calls the real apprehension of a proposition, and there is the notional apprehension. In real apprehension there is the perception of some actual, concrete, individual object, either with the eye or some bodily sense, or with the mind's eye—memory, or imagination. But our minds are not so constructed as to be able to receive and retain only an exact image of each of the objects that comes before us one by one, in and for itself. On the contrary, we compare and contrast. We see, at once "that man is like man, yet unlike, and unlike a horse, a tree, a mountain, or a monument. And in consequence we are ever grouping and discriminating

measuring and sounding, framing cross classes, and cross divisions, and thereby rising from particulars to generals, that is, from images to notions ‘Man’ is no longer what he really is, an individual presented to us by our senses, but as we read him in the light of those comparisons and contrasts which we have made him suggest to us. He is attenuated into an aspect, or relegated to his place in a classification. Thus his appellation is made to suggest, not the real being which he is in this or that specimen of himself, but a definition.” Thus individual propositions about the concrete, in the mind of a thinker whose intellect works in the way of notional apprehension, “almost cease to be, and are diluted or starved into abstract notions. The events of history and the characters who figure in it lose their individuality.”

Now it is not such an aspect, such a view of Shakspeare which it is here attempted to present. To come into close and living relation with the individuality of a poet must be the chief end of our study—to receive from his nature the peculiar impulse and impression which he, best of all, can give. We must not attenuate Shakspeare to an aspect, or reduce him to a definition, or deprive him of individuality, or make of him a mere notion. Yet also no experiment will here be made to bring Shakspeare before the reader as he spoke, and walked, as he jested in his tavern, or meditated in his solitude. It is a real apprehension of Shakspeare’s character and genius which is desired, ~~but~~ not such an apprehension as mere observation of the externals of the man, of his life or of his poetry, would be likely to produce. I wish rather to attain to some central principles

of life in him which animate and control the rest, for such there are existent in every man whose life is life in any true sense of the word, and not a mere affair of chance, of impulse, of moods, and of accidents

In such a study as this we endeavour to pass through the creation of the artist to the mind of the creator but it by no means prevents our returning to view the work of art simply as such, apart from the artist, and as such to receive delight from it Nay, in the end it augments our delight by enabling us to discover a mass of fact which would otherwise be overlooked To enjoy the beauty of a landscape it is not necessary to understand the nature and arrangement of the rocks which underlie or rise up from the soil While studying the stratification of those rocks we absolutely lose sight of the beauty of the landscape Nevertheless, a larger mass of pleasure is in the end possessed by one who adds to his instinctive spontaneous feeling of delight, a knowledge of the geology of the country In like manner, while the study of anatomy is quite distinct from the pleasure which the sight of a beautiful human body gives, yet, in the end, the sculptor who adds to his instinctive, spontaneous delight in the beauty of moulded form and moving limb, a knowledge of human anatomy, receives a mass of pleasure greater than that of one who is unacquainted with the facts of structure and function There is an obvious cause of this The geologist and the anatomist *see more*, and see a new class of phenomena, which produce new delights The lines of force in a landscape, to which an ordinary observer is entirely insensible, come out to the

instructed eye, and give it thrills of strong emotion, like those which we receive from the athletes or the gods of Michael Angelo. The lines of force are drawn in the granite and the sandstone differently, and hence an endless variety of delights corresponding to the infinite variety of the disposition of its rock-forces by Nature. We do not only understand better what is before us, we enjoy it more. We are not attenuating it to an aspect, or inobservant of its individuality, we are, on the contrary, penetrating to the centre of that individuality. It is generally not until the dominant lines of force are clearly perceived that we can group in just proportions the minor details which investigation presents to our notice.

One who stands in the Sistine Chapel at Rome, and looks up to its ceiling, must in due time become aware of his own spirit as if it were some over-burdened caryatid, sustaining the weight of the thought of Michael Angelo. The first effort—and it is no trivial effort—must be to raise oneself to the height of the great argument. Merely to conceive prophet, or sibyl, primitive man or the awful demiurge, as placed before one's eyes, is an exercise which demands concentration of self, and abandonment of the world,—an exercise which strains and exhausts the imagination. To ascend from this to a comprehension of the total product,—to feel the stupendous life which animates not alone each single figure, rapt or brooding, but which circles through them all, which plays from each to the other, and forms the one vital soul that lies behind this manifold creation—to achieve this is something rarer and more difficult. But

there is yet a higher ascension possible. These vast creations, and much beside these, St Peter's at Rome, the David at Florence, the Slaves of the Louvre, the Last Judgment, the Moses, the Tombs of the Medici, the Poems for Vittoria Colonna,—all these are less than Michael Angelo. These were the projections of a single mind. There is something higher and more wonderful than St Peter's, or the Last Judgment—namely, the *mind* which flung these creations into the world. And yet, it is when we make the effort which demands our most concentrated and most sustained energy,—it is when we strive to come into presence of the living mind of the creator, that the sense of struggle and effort is relieved. We are no longer surrounded by a mere world of thoughts and imaginations which, in an almost selfish way, we labour to appropriate and possess. We are in company with a man, and a sense of real human sympathy and fellowship rises within us. Virtue goes out of him. We are conscious of his strength communicating itself to us. We may not overmaster him, and pluck out the heart of his mystery, yet it is good to remain in his companionship. There is something in this invigorating struggle with a nature greater than one's own which unavoidably puts on in one's imagination, the shape of the Hebrew story of Peniel. We wrestle with an unknown man until the breaking of the day. We say, "Tell me, I pray thee, thy name?" and he will not tell it. But though we cannot compel him to reveal his secret, we wrestle with him still. We say, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me." And the blessing is obtained.

If to lay hold of Michael Angelo and to strive with him be the most strenuous feat achievable by the critical imagination in the world of plastic art, to deal with Shakspeare requires more endurance, a firmer nerve, and a finer cunning. The great ideal artist, a Milton, a Michael Angelo, a Dante, betrays himself in spite of the haughtiest reserve. But Shakspeare, if an idealist, was also above all else a realist in art, and lurks almost impregnably behind his work. "The secrets of nature have not more gift in taciturnity"*. And yet some few of the secrets of nature can be wrested from her. But Shakspeare possessed that most baffling of self-defences—*humour*. Just when we have laid hold of him, he eludes us, and we hear only distant ironical laughter. What is to be done? How shall a dramatist—a dramatist possessed of *humour*—be cheated of his privacy? How shall his reserve be overmastered? How shall we interrogate him? Is there any magic word which will compel him to put off disguise, and declare himself in his true shape?

If we could watch his writings closely, and observe their growth, the laws of that growth would be referable to the nature of the man, and to the nature of his environment. And we might even be able to refer to one and the other of these two factors producing a common resultant, that which is specially due to each. Fortunately, the succession of Shakspeare's writings (although it is ~~as~~ probable that neither external nor internal evidence will ever suffice to make the chronology certain and precise), is

* *Troilus and Cressida*, Act iv, Scene 2.

sufficiently ascertained to enable us to study the main features of the growth of Shakspeare as an artist and as a man. We do not now place "A Midsummer Night's Dream" and "The Tempest" side by side as Shakspeare's plays of fairyland. We know that a long interval of time lies between the two, and that if they resemble one another in superficial or accidental circumstances, they must differ to the whole extent of the difference between the youthful Shakspeare, and the mature, experienced, fully developed man. Much is due to the industry of Malone, much to the ingenuity and industry of recent Shakspeare scholars who, in the changes which took place in the poet's manner of writing verse, have found an index, trustworthy in the main, to the true chronology of the plays."

It will be well first to stand away from Shakspeare, and to view him as one element in a world larger than himself. In order that an organism—plant or animal—should exist at all, there must be a certain correspondence between the organism and its environment.

* Mr Spedding, in his article, "Who wrote Henry VIII?" (*Gentleman's Magazine*, August 1850) first applied quantitative criticism of verse peculiarities to the study of Shakspeare's writings. Mr Charles Bathurst, in "Remarks on the Differences of Shakspeare's Versification in different Periods of his Life" (London, 1857), called attention to the change "from broken to interrupted verse" which took place as Shakspeare advanced in his dramatic career, and observed also the increase in the use of double-endings in his later plays. Professor Craik, in his "English of Shakspeare," and Professor J. K. Ingram, in a lecture upon Shakspeare published in "Afternoon Lectures" (Bell and Daldy, 1863), again called attention to these peculiarities of versification as affording evidence for the ascertainment of the chronology of the plays. Finally, about the same time in England and in Germany, two investigators—Rev F. G. Fleay and Professor Hertzberg—began to apply "quantitative criticism" of the characteristics of verse to the determination of the

If it be found to thrive and flourish, we infer that such correspondence is considerable. Now we know something of the Elizabethan period, and we know that Shakspeare was a man who prospered in that period. In that special environment Shakspeare thrived: he put forth his blossoms and bore fruit. And in the smaller matter of material success he flourished also. In an Elizabethan atmosphere he reached his full stature, and became not only great and wise, but famous, rich, and happy. Can we discover any significance in these facts? We are told that Shakspeare "was not of an age, but for all time." That assertion misleads us, and indeed in the same poem to the memory of his friend from which these words are taken, Ben Jonson apostrophises his great rival as "Soul of the Age." Shakspeare was for all time by virtue of certain powers and perceptions, but he also belonged especially to an age, his own age, the age of Spenser, Raleigh, Jonson, Bacon, Bunleigh, Hooker,—a Protestant age, a monarchical age, an age eminently positive and practical. A man does not attain to the universal by abandoning the particular, nor

dates of plays. The test on which Hertzberg chiefly relies is the feminine (double) ending, he gives the percentage of such endings in seven teen plays, and believes that the percentage indicates their chronological order. See the preface to *Cymbeline* in the German Shakespeare Society's edition of Tieck's and Schlegel's translation. Mr Fleay's results, independently ascertained, were published subsequently to Hertzberg's. See *Trans. New Sh. Soc.*, and *Macmillan's Magazine*, Sept 1874. In 1873 Mr Furnivall, in founding the New Shakspeare Society,—before he was aware that Mr Fleay's work was in progress,—insisted on the importance of metrical tests for determining the chronology, and gave the proportion of stopt to unstopt lines in three early and three late plays. The latest contribution to the subject is Professor Ingram's valuable paper read before the New Sh. Soc. on 'the "Weak ending" Test

to the everlasting by an endeavour to overleap the limitations of time and place. The abiding reality exists not somewhere apart in the air, but under certain temporary and local forms of thought, feeling, and endeavour. We come most deeply into communion with the permanent facts and forces of human nature and human life, by accepting first of all this fact,—that a definite point of observation and sympathy, not a vague nowhere, has been assigned to each of us.

What is the ethical significance of that literary movement to which Shakspeare belonged, and of which he was a part—the Elizabethan drama? The question seems at first improper. There is perhaps no body of literature which has less of an express tendency for the intellect than the drama of the age of Elizabeth. It is the outcome of a rich and manifold life, it is full of a sense of enjoyment, and overflowing with energy, but it is for the most part absolutely devoid of a conscious purpose. The chief play-wright of the movement declared that the end of playing, “both at the first and now, was and is to hold as ’twere the mirror up to nature.” A mirror has no tendency. The questions we ask about it are, “Does this mirror reflect clearly and faithfully?” and “In what direction is it turned?” Capacity for perceiving, for enjoying, and for reproducing facts, and facts of as great variety as possible,—this was the qualification of a dramatist in the days of Elizabeth. The facts were those of human passion, and human activity. He needed not, as each of our poets at the present time needs, to have a doctrine, or a revelation, or an interpretation. The mere fact was enough.

without any theory about the fact, and this fact men saw more in its totality, more in the round, because they approached it in the spirit of frank enjoyment. It was not for them attenuated into an aspect, or relegated to a class

In the Renaissance and Reformation period life had grown a real thing,—this life on earth for three score years and ten. The terror and sadness of the Middle Ages, the abandonment of earthly joy, the wistfulness and pathos of spiritual desire, and on the other hand, the scepticism, irony, and sensuality under the ban were things which, as dominant forms of human life, had passed away. The highest mediæval spirits were those which had felt with most intensity that we are strangers and pilgrims here on earth, that we have no abiding place among human loves and human sorrows, that life is of little worth except with reference to infinite, invisible antecedents and issues in other worlds. With all his tender affinities to the brotherhood of elemental powers, and of animals, Saint Francis felt allied to these as brethren only because they had ceased to be rivals for his heart with the supreme lover, Jesus. The deepest religious voice of the Middle Ages couples in a single breath the words *de imitacione Christi* and *de contemptu omnium vanitatum mundi*. It is the ascetic quester, Galahad, with vision undimmed by any mist of earthly passion, who beholds the mystical Grail. Angelico paints paradise, and, because the earth can afford no equal beauty, then paradise again, below the glory of seraphim and cherubim appear the homely faces of priest and monk, transported into the pellucid

and changeless atmosphere of heaven, for these men had abandoned earth, and may therefore inherit perpetual blessedness Dante—filled with keen political passion as he was—finds his subjects of highest imaginative interest not in the life of Florence, and Pisa, and Verona, but in circles of Hell, and the mount of Purgatory, and the rose of beatified spirits Human love ceases to be adequate for the needs of his adult heart, the woman who was dearest to him ceases to be woman, and is sublimed into the supernatural wisdom of theology While the world was thus given over to Satan, those who were lacking in the spiritual passion, and who could not abandon this world, closed a bargain with the evil One Together with the world and the flesh they accepted the devil, as in the legend Faustus does, and as many an one did in fact Our imagination can hardly find a place for Shakspeare in any part of the Middle Ages Either they would transform him, or he would confound and disorganise them. With his ever present sense of truth, his realization of fact, and especially of that great fact, a moral order of the universe, we cannot think of Shakspeare among the men of pleasure, scepticism, and irony, he could not stay his energy or his humour with the shallow lubricities of Boccaccio Neither can we picture to ourselves an ascetic Shakspeare, suppressing his desire of knowledge, transforming his hearty sense of natural enjoyment into curiosities of mystic joy, exhaling his strength in sighs after an "Urbs beata Ierusalem," or in tender lamentation over the vanity of human love and human grief

But in the Renaissance and Reformation period, in-

stead of substituting supernatural powers, and persons, and events for the natural facts of the world, men resorted to those facts, and found in them inspiration and sustenance for heart, and intellect, and conscience. Of paradise men knew somewhat less than Angelico had known, or Dante, but they saw that this earth is good. Physical nature was not damnable, the outlying regions of the earth were not all tenanted by vampires and devils. Sir John Mandeville brought back stories of obscure valleys communicating with hell, and haunted by homicidal demons, Raleigh brought back the tobacco plant and the potato. In the college of his new Atlantis Bacon erects a statue to the inventor of sugar. Dreams of unexplored regions excited the imagination of Spaniard and Englishman in the later Renaissance, but it was of El Dorado they dreamed, with its gold-roofed city, and auriferous sands. Hardy men went forth to establish plantations and possess the earth; And, as these were eager to acquire power over the physical world by extending in the Indies and America the dominion of civilised man, others were no less eagerly engaged in endeavouring to extend, by means of scientific discovery, the dominion of man over all forces and provinces of nature. The student of science was not now a magician, a dealer in the black art, in miracles of the diabolic kind, he pleaded in the courts, he held a seat in parliament, he became Lord Chancellor of England. It was ascertained that heaven was not constructed of a series of spheres moving over and around the earth, but that the earth was truly *in* heaven. This is typical of the moral discovery of the time. Men found that the earth

is in heaven, that God is not above nature, touching it only through rare preternatural points of contact,—rather that He is not far from every one of us, that human life is sacred, and time a fragment of eternity *

Catholicism had endeavoured to sanctify things secular by virtue proceeding towards them from special ecclesiastical persons, and places and acts. The modern spirit, of which Protestantism is a part, revealed in the total life of men a deeper and truer sanctity than can be conferred by touches of any wand of ecclesiastical magic. The burden of the curse was lightened. Knowledge was good, and men set about increasing the store of knowledge by interrogation of nature, and by research into the life of mankind as preserved in ancient literatures. Visible pomp was a thing which the eye might frankly enjoy, men tried to make life splendid. Raleigh rode by the queen in silver armour, the Jesuit Drexelius estimated the value of the shoes worn by this minion of the English Cleopatra at six thousand six hundred gold pieces. The essays "Of Building" and "Of Gardens," by Bacon, show how this superb mundane ritualism had a charm for his imagination. Beauty was now confessed to be good, not the beauty of paradise which Angelico painted, but that of Lionardo's Monna Lisa, and Raffaele's Fornarina, and of the daughters of Palma Vecchio.

* See the excellent opening chapters of "Shakespeare als Protestant, Politiker, Psycholog, und Dichter," by Dr. Eduard Vehse. "Shakespeare, der ungelehrte, unstudirte Dichter ist der erste, in welchem sich der moderne Geist, der von der Welt weiss, der die gesammte Wirklichkeit zu begreifen sucht, energisch zusammenfasst. Dieser moderne Geist ist der gerade Gegensatz des mittelalterlichen Geistes, der erfasst die Welt und namentlich die innere Welt als ein Stück des Himmels, und das Leben als einen Theil der Ewigkeit." Vol. 1, p. 62.

The earth and those excellent creatures, man and woman, walking upon it, formed a spectacle worth a painter's soul. One's country was for the present not the heavenly Jerusalem, but a certain defined portion of this habitable globe, and patriotism became a virtue, and queen worship a piece of religion. Conscience was a faithful witness, an actual sense of sin, and an actual need of righteousness were individual concerns, belonging to the inmost self of each human being, and not to be dealt with by ecclesiastical mechanism, by sale of indulgence, or dispensation of a Pope. Woman was neither a satanic bait to catch the soul of man, nor was she the supernatural object of mediæval chivalric devotion, she was no miracle, yet not less nor other than that endlessly interesting thing—woman. Love, friendship, marriage, the ties of parent and child, jealousy, ambition, hatred, revenge, loyalty, devotion, mercy,—these were not insignificant affairs because belonging to a world which passes away, human life being of importance; these, the blessings and curses of human life, were important also. Heaven may be very real, we have a good hope that it is so, meanwhile here is our earth, a substantial, indubitable fact.

The self-conscious ethics of the Elizabethan period find an imaginative utterance in Spenser's "*Faerie Queene*." Spenser's view of human life is grave and earnest, it is that of a knightly encounter with principalities and powers of evil. Yet Spenser is neither mediæval nor essentially Puritan, the design of the "*Faerie Queene*" is in harmony with the general Elizabethan movement. The problem which the poet

sets himself to consider is not that of our great English prose allegory,—“The Pilgrim’s Progress”—how the soul of man may escape from earth to heaven. Nor is the quest of a mystical Grail a central point in this epic of Arthur. The general end of Spenser’s poem is “to fashion a gentleman or noble person in virtuous and gentle discipline.” A grand self-culture is that about which Spenser is concerned, not as with Bunyan the escape of the soul to heaven, not the attainment of supernatural grace through a point of mystical contact, like the vision which was granted to the virgin knight of the mediæval allegory. Self-culture, the formation of a complete character for the uses of earth, and afterwards, if need be, for the uses of heaven—this was subject sufficient for the twenty-four books designed to form the epic of the age of Elizabeth. And the means of that self-culture are of the active kind, namely warfare,—warfare not for its own sake, but for the generous accomplishment of unselfish ends. Godliness, self-mastery, chastity, fraternity, justice, courtesy, constancy—each of these is an element in the ideal of human character conceived by the poet, not an ascetic, not a mediæval ideal. If we are to give a name to that ideal we must call it Magnificence, Great-doing. Penitential discipline and heavenly contemplation are recognised by Spenser as needful to the perfecting of the Godward side of man’s nature, and as preparing him for strenuous encounter with evil, yet it is characteristic that even Heavenly Contemplation in Spenser’s allegory cannot forget the importance of those wonderful things of earth,—London and the Queen.

Nor is each of Spenser's knights (although upon his own strength and skill assisted, by divine grace depends the issue of his strife), a solitary knight-errant. The poet is not without a sense of the corporate life of humanity. As the virtues are linked one to another by a golden chain, so is each noble nature bound to his fellows. Arthur is the succourer of all, all are the servants of Gloriana. Spenser would seem to have longed for some new order of lofty, corporate life, a later Round Table, suitable to the Elizabethan age. If it were a dream, more fitted for Faery-Land than for England of the sixteenth century, we may perhaps pardon Spenser for belief in incalculable possibilities of virtue, for he had known Sidney, and the character of Sidney seems forever to have lived with him inspiring him with inextinguishable faith in man. With national life Spenser owned a sympathy which we do not expect to find in the mediæval romances of Arthur, written before England had acquired an independent national character, nor in Bunyan's allegory, which does not concern itself with affairs of earthly polity, and which came into existence at a period of national depression, a time when the political enemies of England were her religious allies. But in the days of Elizabeth the nation had sprung up to a consciousness of new strength and vitality, and its political and religious antagonists, Spain and the Papacy, were identical. Faery Land with Spenser is indeed, no dream world, it lies in no distant latitude. His epic abounds with contemporary political and religious feeling. The combat with Orgoglio, the stripping of Duessa, the death of Kirkrapine could have been

written only by an Englishman and a Protestant possessed by no half-hearted hatred towards Spain and the Papal power Spenser's views on Irish politics, which interested him so nearly, are to be discovered in the Legend of Arthegall with hardly less clearness than in his prose dialogue upon the Present State of Ireland

Further, in his material life, Spenser appears to have had a sufficient hold upon positive fact During the same year, in which, for the second time, he became a lover, the year during which he wooed his Elizabeth, and recorded his despairs and raptures in the Italian love-philosophy of the *Amoretti*, the piping and pastoral Colin Clout exhibited suit for three ploughlands, parcels of Shanballymore, and was alleged to have "converted a great deal of corn" elsewhere "to his proper use" Neither love nor poetry made him insensible to the substantial though minor fact of ploughlands of Shanballymore With measureless dominion in Faery Land he yet did not disdain a slice of the forfeited estate of the Earl of Desmond Some powerful hostility hindered his court-preferment, and the grievance finds a place in Spenser's verse His own material life he endeavoured, not altogether successfully, to render solid and prosperous The intention of his great poetical achievement is one which, while in a high sense religious, is at the same time, eminently positive A complete development of noble human character for active uses, not a cloistered virtue, is that which Spenser looked upon as most needed for ~~the people of England~~ Such a design is in harmony with the spirit of England in the days of

Elizabeth To be great and to do great things seemed better than to enter the Celestial City, and forget the City of Destruction, better than to receive in ecstasy the vision of a divine mystery, or to be fed with miraculous food. In Spenser these ethics of the Elizabethan age arrived at a self-conscious existence ▽

Let us, remaining at the same point of view, glance now at Bacon and the scientific movement. Bacon and Shakspeare stand far apart. In moral character and in gifts of intellect and soul we should find little resemblance between them. While Bacon's sense of the presence of physical law in the universe was for his time extraordinarily developed, he seems practically to have acted upon the theory that the moral laws of the world are not inexorable, but rather by tactics and dexterity may be cleverly evaded. Their supremacy was acknowledged by Shakspeare in the minutest as well as in the greatest concerns of human life. Bacon's superb intellect was neither disturbed nor impelled by the promptings of his heart. Of perfect friendship or of perfect love he may, without reluctance, be pronounced incapable. Shakspeare yielded his whole being to boundless and measureless devotion. Bacon's ethical writings sparkle with a frosty brilliancy of fancy, playing over the worldly maxims which constituted his wisdom for the conduct of life. Shakspeare reaches to the ultimate truths of human life and character through a supreme and indivisible energy of love, imagination, and thought. Yet Bacon and Shakspeare belonged to one great movement of humanity. The whole endeavour of Bacon in science is to attain the fact, and to

ascend from particular facts to general. He turned away with utter dissatisfaction from the speculating *in vacuo* of the middle ages. His intellect demanded positive knowledge, he could not feed upon the wind. From the tradition of philosophy and from authority he reverted to nature. Between faith and reason Bacon set a great and impassable gulf. Theology is something too high for human intellect to discuss. Bacon is profoundly deferential to theology, because, as one cannot help suspecting, he was profoundly indifferent about it. The schoolmen for the service of faith had summoned human reason to their aid, and Reason, the ally, had in time proved a dangerous antagonist. Bacon, in the interest of science, dismissed faith to the unexceptionable province of supernatural truths. To him a dogma of theology was equally credible whether it possessed an appearance of reasonableness or appeared absurd. The total force of intellect he reserved for subjugating to the understanding the world of positive fact.

As the matter with which Bacon's philosophy concerns itself is positive, so its end is pre-eminently practical. The knowledge he chiefly valued was that which promised to extend the dominion of man over nature, and thus to enrich man's life. His conception of human welfare was large and magnificent, yet it was wanting in some spiritual elements which had not been lost sight of in earlier and darker times. To human welfare, thus conceived in a way somewhat materialistic, science is to minister. And the instruments of science by which it attains this end are the purely natural instruments of observation, experiment, and inference. Devotion to

the fact, a return from the supernatural to the strictly natural and human, with a practical, mundane object—these are the characteristics of the Elizabethan movement in science *

Let us now turn to the religious movement in England. That movement cannot be said to have had, like the Reformation movement in Germany, a central point of vitality and sustenance in the agony of an individual conscience. Nor was it guided like the movement in France by a supreme organising power—theological and political, capable of large, if somewhat too logically rigid, ideal conceptions. The dogma of Anglicanism is not like Calvinistic dogma, the expression and development of an idea, it becomes intelligible only through recollection of a series of historical events,—the balance of parties, compromises with this side and with that, the exigencies of times and seasons. But if England had neither a Luther nor a Calvin, she had Cranmer and Hooker. The religious revolution of France in the sixteenth century, like the political revolution of 1789, though it sent a strong wave of moral feeling through Europe, failed to sustain itself. Its uncompromising ideality kept it too much out of relation with the vital, concrete, and ever-altering facts of human society. The English reformation on the other hand, if less presentable in logical formulæ to the intellect, was, like English political freedom as com-

* Mr Spedding's estimate of Bacon differs much from that given above; and Mr Spedding has the best right of any living person to speak of Bacon. One must, however, remain faithful to one's own impression of facts, even when that impression is founded on partial (yet not wholly insufficient) knowledge.

pared with French liberty, equality, and fraternity, much more of a practical success

Cosmopolitan the English Reformation was not, it was a growth of the soil, and cannot be transplanted, this is its note of inferiority, and equally its characteristic excellence. By combined firmness and easiness of temper, by concessions and compromises, by unweariable good sense, a reformed church was brought into existence,—a manufacture rather than a creation,—in which the average man might find average piety, average rationality, and an average amount of soothing appeal to the senses, while rarer spirits could frame out of the moderation of the Anglican ritual and Anglican devotional temper, a refined type of piety, free from extravagance, delicate and pure, offending like the cathedrals of England neither by rigidity on the one hand, not by flamboyant fervours on the other, the type of piety realized in a distinguished degree by George Herbert, by Keble. In his Ecclesiastical Sonnets Wordsworth speaks of the ritual and liturgy of the Church of England as affording material and scope for “the intensities of hope and fear,” and for “passionate exercise of lofty thoughts.” In the preface to “The Christian Year” the moderation, the soothing influence of the devotional services of the church are noticed. Wordsworth, even when the flood of spiritual light and strength which encompassed his youth and early manhood had ebbed, remained Wordsworth still, and from beyond the little neatly-ordered enclosure of Anglicanism voices still came to him of mountain winds and of “mighty waters rolling evermore.” Keble, who was born and bred in

the Anglican paddock, understood its limitations better, and wrote the true poetry of his communion—a poetry free from all risk of being over poetical. Dante is the poet of Catholicism, Milton is the poet of Puritanism, the poet of Anglicanism is Keble

Much in the ecclesiastical history of our country was due to Cranmer. Had that unworthy right hand of his been less sensitive or less pliable, the Church of England might have been a more heroic witness for truth (sometimes a noble failure serves the world as faithfully as does a distinguished success), but it could hardly have become a national institution with roots which ramify through every layer of society. And Hooker,—in what lies the special greatness of Hooker? Is not his special quality a majestic common sense? “If we are to fix on any fundamental position,” writes the Dean of St Paul’s, “as the key of Hooker’s method of arguing, I should look for it in his doctrine, so pertinaciously urged, and always implied, of the concurrence and co-operation, each in its due place, of all possible means of knowledge for man’s direction.” Puritanism appealed against reason to the letter of Scripture, and sacrificed fact to theory. The Renaissance philosophers appealed from authority to human reason alone. “Hooker, while assigning the ultimate, judicial position to reason, will not deny its place to either Scripture or to the Church, or to tradition. He is an embodiment of the ecclesiastical wisdom of England. While providing the Church, as the Dean of St Paul’s has said, with a broad,

* I am not sure whether Mr Matthew Arnold has not applied this expression “majestic common sense” to Hooker

intelligible theory, Hooker saves this theory from rigidity, and merely ideal constructiveness, by rooting it in his rich feeling for the concrete fact. Characteristically English the work of Hooker will always remain by its lying close to reality, by its practical tendency, by its moderation, by its large good-sense. More massive Hooker's spirituality becomes, because it includes a noble realization of positive fact.

Now the same soil that produced Bacon and Hooker produced Shakspeare, the same environment fostered the growth of all three. Can we discover anything possessed in common by the scientific movement, the ecclesiastical movement, and the drama of the period? That which appears to be common to all is *a rich feeling for positive, concrete fact*. The facts with which the drama concerns itself are those of human character in its living play. And assuredly, whatever be its imperfection, its crudeness, its extravagance, no other body of literature has amassed in equal fulness and equal variety a store of concrete facts concerning human character and human life, assuredly not the drama of Æschylus and Sophocles, not the drama of Calderon and Lope de Vega, not the drama of Corneille and Racine. These give us views of human life, and select portions of it for artistic handling. The Elizabethan drama gives us the stuff of life itself, the coarse with the fine, the mean with the heroic, the humorous and grotesque with the tragic and the terrible. The personages of the drama—if we except those of Marlowe—"are not symbols of any absolute or ideal type. The human being is not defined by its most prominent faculty, nor life by its most potent manifesta-

tion The beings themselves, life itself, are brought before us on the scene, and that with a reality, truth, and perfection the highest ever attained by man.”—

Poetry in this Elizabethan period is put upon a purely human basis No fate broods over the actions of men, and the history of families, the only fatality is the fatality of character† Luck, an outstanding element, helping to determine the lives of mortals, and not reducible to known law, luck good and bad, Shakspeare readily admits, but luck is strictly a thing in the course of nature The divinity which shapes our ends works efficiently, but secretly Men’s lives in the drama of Shakspeare are not disorganised and denaturalised by irruptions of the miraculous The one standing miracle is the world itself That power and virtue which can achieve wonders, which can do higher things than all feats of grotesque magic recorded in the Legend, is simply a noble or beautiful soul of man or woman If we recognise in a moral order of the world a divine presence, then the divine presence is never absent from the Shaksperian world For such sacred thaumaturgy

* Joseph Mazzini, Critical and Literary Writings, vol II, pp 133, 34 On what follows Mazzini writes —“In Shakspeare, and this is a real progress (as compared with Æschylus), liberty does exist The act of a single day, or it may be of an hour, has thrown an entire life under the dominion of necessity, but in that day or hour the man was free, and arbiter of his own future.”—p 135

† Shakspeare stellte zuerst seine Stücke auf ganz rein menschlichen Boden Wie eines Menschen Gemüth ist, so ist auch sein Schicksal

“Alles, was äusserlich geschieht, ist bei Shakspeare durch ein Inneres bedingt”—E VEHSE, *Shakspeare als Protestant*, &c, vol I, pp 57, 58

as that of Calderon's *Autos* we shall in vain seek in the drama of England *

A vigorous, mundane vitality—this constitutes the basis of the Elizabethan drama. Vigour reveals on the one hand the tragedy of life. Love and hatred, joy and sorrow, life and death being very real to a vigorous nature, tragedy becomes possible. To one who exists languidly from day to day, neither can the cross and passion of any human heart be intelligible, nor the solemn intensities of joy, the glorious resurrection and ascension of a life and soul. The heart must be all alive and sensitive before the imagination can conceive, with swift assurance, and no hesitation or error, extremes of rapture and of pain. The stupendous mass of Lear's agony, and the spasms of anguish which make Othello writhe in body as in mind, fell within the compass of the same imagination that included at the other extremity the trembling expectation of Troilus, before the entrance of Cressida,†—into which the dramatist

• It is remarkable that the peculiar merit of Calderon recognised by Shelley in his *Defence of Poetry*,—a merit which Shelley cannot attribute to the Elizabethan dramatists,—should be his endeavour to connect art with religion

† *Troilus* —I am giddy, expectation whirls me round

The imaginary relish is so sweet
That it enchants my sense, what will it be,
When that the watery palate tastes indeed
Love's thrice repur'd nectar? Death, I fear me,
Swoboning destruction, or some joy too fine,
Too subtle potent, tuned too sharp in sweetness,
For the capacity of my ruder powers
I fear it much and I do fear besides,
That I shall lose distinction in my joys,
As doth a battle, when they charge on heaps
The enemy flying —*Act III Scene 2*

enters so profoundly, while at the same time he holds himself ironically aloof,—the fulness of satisfied need when Posthumus embraces Imogen,—

Hang there like fruit, my soul,
Till the tree die!

and the rapture (almost transcending the bounds of consciousness) of Pericles upon the recovery of 'his long-lost' Marina --

O Helicanus, strike me, honour'd sir,
Give me a gash, put me to present pain,
Lest this great sea of joys rushing upon me
O'erbear the shores of my mortality,
And drown me with their sweetness

On the other hand this same vigour enables men to perceive and enjoy the comedy of life, for vigour enjoys folly, when it laughs, like Shakspeare's Valentine, "it laughs like a cock" One who is thoroughly in earnest is not afraid to laugh, he knows that he may safely have his laugh out, and that it will not disturb the solid relations of things It is only when we are half in earnest that we cherish our seriousness, and tremble lest the dignity of our griefs or joys should be impaired And accordingly when great tragedies can be written joyous comedies can be written also But when life grows base or trivial, when great tragedy ceases (as in the period of the Restoration), when false heroics, and showy sentimentality take the place of tragic passion, then the laughter of men becomes brutal and joyless,—the crackling of thorns under a pot

This vigorous vitality which underlies the Elizabethan drama is essentially mundane To it all that is upon this earth is real, and it does not concern itself greatly

about the reality of other things. Of heaven or hell it has no power to sing. It finds such and such facts here and now, and does not invent or discover supernatural causes to explain the facts. It pursues man to the moment of death, but it pursues him no farther. If it confesses "the burden of the mystery" of human life it does not attempt to lighten that burden by any "Thus saith the Lord," which cannot be verified or attested by actual experience. If it contains a divine element, the divine is to be looked for *in* the human, not apart from the human. It knows eternity only through time which is a part of eternity *

Without an ethical tendency, then, the Elizabethan drama yet produces an ethical effect. A faithful presentation of the facts of the world does not leave us

* The following passage adds to what has been written above, and illustrates it. "The feeling which we commonly call pathos seems, when one analyses it, to arise out of a perception of grand incongruities—filling a place in one class of our ideas corresponding to that in another in which the sense of the ludicrous is placed by Locke. And this pathos was attained by mediæval asceticism through its habit of dwarfing into insignificance the earthly life and its belongings, and setting the meanness and wretchedness which it attributed to it, in contrast to the far-off vision of glory and greatness. Another sort of pathos—the Pagan—results from a full realising of the joy and the beauty of the earth, and the nobleness of men's lives on it, and from seeing a grand inexplicableness in the incongruity between the brightness of these and the darkness which lies at either end of them—the infinite contradiction between actual greatness and the apparent nothingness of its whence and whither—the mystery of strong and beautiful impulses finding no adequate outcome now, nor promise of ever finding it hereafter—human passion kindling into light and glow, only to burn itself out into ashes—the struggle kept up by the will of successive generations against Fate, ever beginning and ever ending in defeat, to recommence as vainly as before—the never answered, Why? uttered unceasingly in myriad tones from out all human life. The poetry of the Greeks gained from the contemplation of these things a pathos which, however gladly a Christian poet may forego such gain •

indifferent to good and evil, but rather rouses within us, more than all maxims and all preaching can, an inextinguishable loyalty to good. It is any falsifying of those facts, whether the falsification be that of the sensualist or of the purist, whether it be a lie told to seduce us to vice, or to bribe us to virtue,—it is this which may possibly lead us aside from directness, simplicity, and uprightness of action. Is the Elizabethan drama religious! No, if religion be something which stands over and above human life, luring it away from earth—no, if the highest acts of religion be an access to the Divine presence through special ecclesiastical rites, and places, and persons. Yes, if the facts of the world be themselves sacred,—parts of a divine

for his art, was in its sadness inexpressibly beautiful. The *Iliad* had a deep under-current of it even in the midst of all its healthy childlike objectivity, and it was ever present amongst the great tragedian's introspective analysings of humanity. High art of later times has, for the most part, retained this Pagan beauty. Though there is no reason to think that there was any Paganism in Shakspeare's creed, yet we cannot help feeling that, whether the cause is to be sought in his individual genius, or in Renaissance influences, the spirit of his art is in many respects Pagan. In his great tragedies he traces the workings of noble or lovely human characters on to the point—and no further—where they disappear into the darkness of death, and ends with a look *back*, never on towards anything beyond. His sternly truthful realism will not, of course, allow him to attempt a shallow poetical justice, and mete out to each of his men and women the portion of earthly good which might seem their due, and his artistic instincts—positive rather than speculative—prefer the majesty and infinite sadness of unexplainedness to any attempt to look on towards a future solution of hard riddles in human fates"—E. D. West (in the first of two articles on "Browning as a Preacher" *The Dark Blue Magazine*, October and November, 1871). This passage may be borne in mind to illustrate the view taken of the great tragedies of Shakspeare in a subsequent chapter of this volume. See also on the agnosticism of Shakspeare—Mr Ruskin's lecture, "The Mystery of Life and its Arts" in *Afternoon Lectures* (Dublin, M'Gez, 1869), pp. 110 111

order of things, and interpenetrated by that Supreme Reality, apprehended yet unknowable, of which the worlds of matter and of mind are a manifestation .

To many, at the present time, the sanity and the strength of Shakspeare would assuredly be an influence that might well be called religious The Elizabethan drama is thoroughly free from lassitude, and from that lethargy of heart, which most of us have felt at one time or another Those whose lot falls in a period of doubt and spiritual alteration, between the ebb and the flow, in the welter and wash of the waves, are,—because they lack the joyous energy of a faith—peculiarly subject to this mood of barren lethargy And it is not alone in the mystic, spiritual life of the soul that we may suffer from coldness or aridity There are seasons when a sterile world-weariness is induced by the superficial barrenness of life The persons we know seem to shrivel up and become wizened and grotesque The places we have loved transform themselves into ugly little prisons The ideals for which we lived appear absurd patterns, insignificant arabesques, devoid of idea and of beauty Our own heart is a most impertinent and unprofitable handful of dust It is well if some supreme joy or sorrow which has overtaken us save us from possible recurrence of this mood of weary cynicism But humbler means at times have served The tear shed over a tale of Mafmontel by one who recorded his malady and his recovery, has occasioned certain smiles on critical lips* A true physician of the soul discerns that such a tear is not despicable, but significant as the

* J S Mill's Autobiography, pp 140-41

beads of perspiration which tell that the crisis of a fever is favourably passed. To this mood of barren world-weariness the Elizabethan drama comes with no direct teaching, but with the vision of life. Even though death end all, these things at least *are*—beauty and force, purity, sin, and love, and anguish and joy. These things are, and therefore life cannot be a little idle whirl of dust. We are shown the strong man taken in the toils, the sinner sinking farther and farther away from light and reality and the substantial life of things into the dubious and the dusk, the pure heart all vital, and confident, and joyous; we are shown the glad, vicarious sacrifice of soul for soul, the malign activity of evil, the vindication of right by the true justiciary, we are shown the good common things of the world, and the good things that are rare, the love of parents and children, the comradeship of young men, the exquisite vivacity, courage, and high-spirited intellect of noble girlhood, the devotion of man and woman to man and woman. The vision of life rises before us, and we know that the vision represents a reality. These things, then, being actual, how poor and shallow a trick of the heart is cynicism!

Two views of the character of Shakspeare have been offered for our acceptance, we are expected to make a choice between the two. According to one of these views Shakspeare stands before us as a cheerful, self-possessed, and prudent man, who conducted his life with sound worldly judgment, and he wrote plays, about which he did not greatly care, acquired property, about which he cared much, retired to Stratford, and attaining

the end of his ambition, became a wealthy and respectable burgess of his native town, bore the arms of a gentleman, married his two daughters with prudence, and died with the happy consciousness of having gained a creditable and substantial position in the world. The other view of Shakspeare's character has been recently presented by M. Taine with his unflagging brilliancy and energy. According to this second conception Shakspeare was a man of almost superhuman passions, extreme in joy and pain, impetuous in his transports, disorderly in his conduct, heedless of conscience, but sensitive to every touch of pleasure, a man of inordinate, extravagant genius.

It is impossible to accept either of these representations of Shakspeare as a complete statement of the fact. Certain it is, however, that a portion of truth is contained in the first of these two Shakspeare theories. There can be no doubt that Shakspeare considered it worth his while to be prudent, industrious, and economical. He would appear to have had a very sufficient sense of life, and in particular of his own life, as real, and of this earth as a possession. He had seen his father sinking deeper and deeper into pecuniary embarrassment, and dropping away from the good position which he had held amongst his fellow townsmen. Shakspeare had married at eighteen years of age; he was at the age of twenty-one the father of a son, and of two daughters, a reckless, improvident life became more than ever undesirable. He took the means which gave him the best chance of attaining worldly prosperity, he made himself useful in every possible

way to his dramatic company While others, Greene, and Peele, and Marlowe, had squandered their strength in the turbulent life of London, Shakspeare husbanded his strength The theatrical life did not bring satisfaction to him, he felt that his moral being suffered loss while he spent himself upon the miscellaneous activities forced upon him by his position and profession, he was made for a higher, purer life of more continuous progress towards all that is excellent, and he felt painfully that his nature was being subdued to what it worked in, as the dyer's hand receives its stain * Nevertheless he did not, in the fashion of idealists, hastily abandon the life which seemed to entail a certain spiritual loss, he recognised the reality of external, objective duties and claims, duties to his father, to his family, to his own future self, he accepted the logic of facts, he compelled the lower and provisional life of player and playwright to become the servant of his higher life, as far as circumstances permitted, and he carefully and steadily applied himself to effecting his deliverance from that provisional life at the earliest suitable period, but not before that period had arrived And afterwards when Shakspeare had become a prosperous country gentleman, he did not endeavour to cut himself loose from his past life which had served him, and the associates who had been his friends and helpers, the Stratford gentleman who might write himself Armigero "In any bill, warrant, quittance, or obligation," was not so enamoured of this distinction as to be ashamed of the days when he lived by public means, he remembers in his will among the

rural esquires and gentry, "My Fellowes, John Hemynges, Richard Burbage, and Henry Cundell."

Thus all through his life we observe in Shakspeare a sufficient recognition of external fact, external claims, and obligations. Hence worldly prosperity could not be a matter which would ever seem unimportant to Shakspeare. In 1604, when he was a wealthy man, William Shakspeare brought an action against Philip Rogers, in the Court of Stratford, for £1, 15s 10d, being the price of malt sold and delivered to him at different times. The incident is characteristic. Shakspeare evidently could estimate the precise value for this temporal life (though possibly net for eternity), of £1 15s 10d, and in addition to this he bore down with unfaltering insistence on the positive fact that the right place out of all the universe for the said £1, 15s 10d to occupy, lay in the pocket of William Shakspeare.

Practical, positive, and alive to material interests, Shakspeare unquestionably was. But there is another side to his character. About the same time that he brought his action against Philip Rogers for the price of malt, the poet was engaged upon his "Othello" and his "Lear." Is it conceivable that Shakspeare thought more of his pounds than of his plays? Strongly as he felt the fact about the little sum of money which he sought to recover, is it not beyond possibility of doubt that his whole nature was immeasurably more kindled, aroused, and swayed by the vision of Lear upon the heath, of Othello taken in the snake-like folds of Iago's cunning, and by the inscrutable mysteries respecting human life which these suggested? It is highly impor-

tant to fix our attention on what is positive, practical, and finite in Shakspeare's art, as well as in Shakspeare's life. But if the poet was of his own age, he was also "for all time." He does not merely endeavour to compass and comprehend the knowable, he broods with a passionate intensity over that which cannot be known. And again, he not only studies self-control, he could depict, and we cannot doubt that he knew by personal experience absolute abandonment and self-surrender. The infinite of meditation, the infinite of passion, both these lay within the range of Shakspeare's experience and Shakspeare's art. He does not, indeed, come forward with explanations of the mysteries of existence, perhaps because he felt more than other men their mysteriousness. Many of us seem to think it the all-essential thing to be provided with answers to the difficult questions which the world propounds, no matter how little the answers be to these great questions. Shakspeare seems to have considered it more important to put the questions greatly, to feel the supreme problems.

Thus Shakspeare, like nature and like the vision of human life itself, if he does not furnish us with a doctrine, has the power to free, arouse, dilate. Again and again we fall back into our little creed or our little theory. Shakspeare delivers us, under his influence we come anew into the presence of stupendous mysteries, and, instead of our little piece of comfort, and support, and contentment, we receive the gift of solemn awe, and bow the head in reverential silence. These questions are not stated by Shakspeare as intellectual problems. He states them pregnantly, for the emotions and for the imagination.

And it is by virtue of his very knowledge that he comes face to face with the mystery of the unknown. Because he had sent down his plummet farther into the depths than other men, he knew better than others how fathomless for human thought those depths remain "Un génie," Victor Hugo has said, "est un promontoire dans l'infini" [This promontory which we name Shakspeare stretching out long and sharp has before it measureless sea and the mass of threatening cloud; behind it the habitable globe, illuminated, and alive with moving figures of man and woman

Our conclusion, therefore, is that Shakspeare lived and moved in two worlds—one limited, practical, positive, the other a world opening into two infinities, an infinity of thought, and an infinity of passion. He did not suppress either life to the advantage of the other, but he adjusted them, and by stern and persistent resolution held them in the necessary adjustment. In the year 1602 Shakspeare bought for the sum of three hundred and twenty pounds, one hundred and seven acres of arable land in the parish of Old Stratford. It was in the same year (if the chronology of Delius be accepted as correct) that Shakspeare, in the person of his Hamlet, musing on a skull, was tracing out the relations of a buyer of land to the soil in a somewhat singular fashion. "This fellow might be in's time a great buyer of land, with his statutes, his recognizances, his fines, his double vouchers, his recoveries, is this the fine of his fines, and the recovery of his recoveries, to have his fine pate full of fine dirt?" The courtier Osric, who has "much land and fertile," is described by the Prince (who could

be contented in a nut shell, but that he has bad dreams) as "spacious in the possession of dirt." Yet this dirt Shakspeare used to serve his needs

How shall a man live sanely in presence of the small daily facts of life (which are also not small but great), and in presence of the vast mystery of death? How shall he proportion his interests between the bright illuminated spot of the known, and the dim, environing unknown which possesses such strong attraction for the soul? How shall he restrain and attach his desires to the little objects which claim each its definite share of the heart, while the heart longs to abandon itself to some one thing with measureless devotion? Shakspeare's attainment of sanity and self-control was not that of a day or of a year, it was the attainment of his life. Now he was tempted by his speculative intellect and imagination to lose all clear perception of his limited and finite life, and again he was tempted to resign the conduct of his being by the promptings of a passionate heart. He is inexorable in his plays to all rebels against the fact; because he was conscious of the strongest temptation to become himself a rebel. He cannot forgive an idealist, because in spite of his practical and positive nature he was (let the Sonnets witness) an idealist himself. His series of dramatic writings is one long study of self-control.

And Shakspeare, we have good reason to believe, did at last attain to the serene self-possession which he had sought with such persistent effort. He feared that he might become (in spite of Mercutio's jests) a Romeo; he feared that he might falter from his strong self-maintenance

into a Hamlet, he suffered grievous wrong and he resolved that he would not be a Timon. He ended by becoming Duke Prospero. Admired Miranda—truly “a thread of his own life”—he made over to the young gallant Ferdinand—(and yet was there not a touch of sadness in resigning to a somewhat shallow-souled Fletcher the art he loved?) He broke his magic staff, he drowned his book deeper than ever plummet sounded, he went back, serenely looking down upon all of human life, yet refusing his share in none of it, to his Dukedom at Stratford resolved to do Duke’s work, such as it is, well, yet Prospero must forever have remained somewhat apart and distinguished from other Dukes, and Warwickshire magnificoes, by virtue of the enchanted island, and the marvellous years of mageship.

It has been asked whether Shakspeare was a Protestant or a Catholic, and he has been proved to belong to each communion to the satisfaction of contending theological zealots. Shakspeare’s poetry, resting upon a purely human basis, is not a rendering into art of the dogmas of either Catholicism or Protestantism. Shakspeare himself, a great artistic nature, framed for manifold joy and pain, may, like other artists, have had no faculty for the attainment of certitude upon extra-mundane and super-human matters, of concrete moral facts he had the clearest perception, but we do not find that he was interested, at least as an artist, in truths or alleged truths which transcend the limits of human experience. That the world suggests inquiries which cannot be answered,—that mysteries confront and baffle us,—that around our knowledge lies ignorance, around our

light, darkness, this to Shakspeare seemed a fact containing within it a profound significance, which might almost be named religious. But studiously as Shakspeare abstains from embodying theological dogma in his art, and tolerant as his spirit is, it is certain that the spirit of Protestantism,—of Protestantism considered as portion of a great movement of humanity,—animates and breathes through his writings. Unless he had stood in antagonism to his time, it could not be otherwise. Shakspeare's creed is not a series of abstract statements of truth, but a body of concrete impulses, tendencies, and habits. The spirit of his faith is not to be ascertained by bringing together little sentences from the utterances of this one of his *dramatis personæ* and of that. By such a method he might be proved (as Birch tried to prove Shakspeare), an atheist*. The faith by which Shakspeare lived, is rather to be discovered by noting the total issue and resultant of his art towards, the fostering and sustenance of a certain type of human character. It may be asserted, without hesitation, that the Protestant type of character, and the Protestant polity in state and nation, is that which has received impulse and vigour from the mind of the greatest of English poets. Energy, devotion to the fact, self-government, tolerance, a disbelief in minute apparatus

* "Inquiry into the Philosophy and Religion of Shakspeare," 1818. This is also too much the method (leading, however, to a very different result), of Flathe in the laborious chapter "Die Anschauungen Shakspeare's über sein Selbst, &c.," which opens the first volume of "Shakspeare in seiner Wirklichkeit." On this subject see Velsse's book already referred to, the last of Kreyssig's lectures in his smaller work, "Shakspeare-Fragen," and Rümelin "Shakspeare Studien," pp. 207-215 (second edition).

for the improvement of human character, an indifference to externals in comparison with that which is of the invisible life, and a resolution to judge all things from a purely human standpoint, these grow upon us as habits of thought and feeling, as long as Shakspeare remains an influence with us in the building up of character. Such habits of thought and feeling are those which belong more especially to the Protestant ideal of manhood.*

Is Shakspeare a religious poet? An answer has been given to this question by Mr Walter Bagehot, which contains the essential truth "If this world is not all evil, he who has understood and painted it best, must probably have some good. If the underlying and almighty essence of this world be good, then it is likely that the writer who most deeply approached to that essence will be himself good. There is a religion of weekdays as well as of Sundays, a religion of 'cakes and ale' as well as of pews and altar cloths. This England lay before Shakspeare as it lies before us all, with its green fields, and its long hedgerows, and its many trees, and its great towns, and its endless hamlets, and its motley society, and its long history, and its bold

* See on this subject the able reply to Rio by Michael Bernays in *"Jahrbuch der Deutschen Shakespeare Gesellschaft,"* vol. 1. pp 220 299. A minute but perhaps significant piece of evidence has been noticed recently by H von Friesen. In *Romeo and Juliet, Act iv Scene 1*, we read, "Or shall I come to you at evening mass?" No Catholic, observes H von Friesen, could have spoken of "evening mass"—*"Altengland und William Shakspeare (1874),"* pp 286, 87. Staunton had previously noticed the difficulty. But see the paper on this passage by the late Mr R Simpson, in *"Transactions of New Shakspeare Society,"* 1875 76.

exploits, and its gathering power, and he saw that they were good. To him perhaps more than to any one else has it been given to see that they were a great unity, a great religious object, that if you could only descend to the inner life, to the deep things, to the secret principles of its noble vigour, to the essence of character. We might, so far as we are capable of so doing, understand the nature which God has made. Let us then think of him, not as a teacher of dry dogmas, or a sayer of hard sayings, but as

"A priest to us all
Of the wonder and bloom of the world,"—

a teacher of the hearts of men and women."

It is impossible, however, that the sixteenth or the seventeenth century should set a limit to the nineteenth. The voyaging spirit of man cannot remain within the enclosure of any one age or any single mind. We need to supplement the noble positivism of Shakspeare with an element not easy to describe or define, but none the less actual, which the present century has demanded as essential to its spiritual life and well-being, and which its spiritual teachers—Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, Newman, Maurice, Carlyle, Browning, Whitman (a strange and apparently motley assemblage!) have supplied and are still supplying. The scientific movement of the present century is not more unquestionably a fact, than this is a fact. In the meantime to enter with strong and undisturbed comprehension into Shakspeare, let us endeavour to hold ourselves strenuously at the Shaksperian stand-

* Estimates of some Englishmen and Scotchmen, by Walter Bagehot,

point, and view the universe from thence We shall afterwards go our way, as seems best ; bearing with us Shakspeare's gift And Shakspeare has no better gift to bestow than the strength and courage to pursue our own path, through pain or through joy, with vigour and resolution.

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CHAPTER II

THE GROWTH OF SHAKSPERE'S MIND AND ART

IN the preceding chapter a brief and partial study was attempted of Shakspeare the man, and Shakspeare the artist, considered as one element in the great intellectual and spiritual movement of the Elizabethan period. The organism,—a dramatic poet,—we endeavoured to view in connection with its environment. Now we proceed to observe, in some few of its stages of progress, the growth of that organism. Shakspeare in 1590, Shakspeare in 1600, and Shakspeare in 1610, was one and the same living entity, but the adolescent Shakspeare differed from the adult, and again from Shakspeare in the 'supremacy of his ripened manhood, as much as the slender stem, graceful and pliant, spreading its first leaves to the sunshine of May, differs from the moving expanse of greenery, visible a century later, which is hard to comprehend and probe with the eye in its infinite details, multitudinous and yet one, receiving through its sensitive surfaces the gifts of light and dew, of noonday and of night, grasping the earth with inextricable living knots, not unpossessed of haunts of shadow and secrecy, instinct with ample mysterious murmurs,—the tree which has a history, and bears in wrinkled bark and wrenched bough memorials of time and change, of hard-

ship, and drought, and storm. The poet Gray in a well-known passage, invented a piece of beautiful mythology, according to which the infant Shakspeare is represented as receiving gifts from the great Dispensatress —

Far from the sun and summer gale
In thy green lap was Nature's darling laid,
What time, where lucid Avon strayed,
To him the mighty Mother did unveil
Her awful face, the dauntless Child
Stretched forth his little arms and smiled,
This pencil take, she said, whose colours clear
Richly paint the vernal year,
Thine too these golden keys, immortal Boy !
This can unlock the gates of Joy,
Of Horror that, and thrilling Fears,
Or ope the sacred fount of sympathetic Tears

But the mighty Mother, more studious of the welfare of her charge, in fact gave her gifts only as they could be used. Those keys she did not entrust to Shakspeare until, by manifold experience, by consolidating of intellect, imagination and passions, and by the growth of self-control, he had become fitted to confront the dreadful, actual presences of human anguish and of human joy.

Everything takes up its place more rightly in a spacious world, accurately observed, than in the narrow world of the mere idealist. In bare acquisition of observed fact Shakspeare marvellously increased from year to year. He grew in wisdom and in knowledge (such an admission does not wrong the divinity of genius), not less but more than other men. Quite a little library exists, illustrating the minute acquaintance of Shakspeare with this branch of information, and with that "The Legal

Acquirements of Shakspeare," "Shakspeare's Knowledge and Use of the Bible," "Shakspeare's Delineations of Insanity," "The Rural Life of Shakspeare," "Shakspeare's Garden," "The Ornithology of Shakspeare," "The Insects mentioned by Shakspeare," and such like Conjectural enquiry, which attempts to determine whether Shakspeare was an attorney's clerk, or whether he was a soldier, whether Shakspeare was ever in Italy, or whether he was in Germany, or whether he was in Scotland, enquiry such as this may lead to no very certain result, with respect to the particular matter in question. But one thing which such special critical studies as these establish, is the enormous receptivity of the poet. This vast and varied mass of information he assimilated and made his own. And such store of information came to Shakspeare only by the way, as an addition to the more important possession of knowledge about human character and human life which forms the proper body of fact needful for dramatic art. In proportion 'as an animal is of great size, the masses of nutriment which he procures are large. "The Arctic whale gulps in whole shoals of acalephæ and molluscs."

But it was not alone, or chiefly through mass of acquisition that Shakspeare became great. He was not merely a centre for the drifting capital of knowledge. Each faculty expanded, and became more energetic, while at the same time the structural arrangement of the man's whole nature became more complex and involved. His power of thought increased steadily as years went by, both in sure grasp of the known, and in brooding intensity of gaze upon the unknown. His emotions,

instead of losing their energy and subtilty as youth deepened into manhood, instead of becoming dulled and crusted over by contact with the world, became (as is the case with all the greatest men and women), by contact with the world swifter and of more ample volume. As Shakspeare penetrated farther and farther into the actual facts of our life, he found in those facts more to rouse and kindle and sustain the heart, he discovered more awful and mysterious darkness, and also more intense and lovelier light. And it is clearly ascertainable from his plays and poems, that Shakspeare's *will* grew with advancing age, beyond measure, calmer, and more strong. Each formidable temptation he succeeded, before he was done with it, in subduing, at least so far as to preclude a fatal result. In the end he obtained serene and indefeasible possession of himself. He still remained indeed baffled before the mystery of life and death, but he had gained vigour to cope with fate, he could "accept all things not understood." And during these years, while each faculty was augmenting its proper life, the vital play of one faculty into and through the other, became more swift, subtle, and penetrating. In Shakspeare's earlier writings, we can observe him setting his wit to work, or his fancy to work, now he is clever and intellectual, and again he is tender and enthusiastic. But in his later style, imagination and thought, wisdom, and mirth, and charity, experience and surmise play into and through one another, until frequently the significance of a passage becomes obscured by its manifold vitality. The murmur of an embryo thought or feeling already obscurely

mingles with the murmurs of the parent life in which it is enveloped *

Now, what does extraordinary growth imply?† It implies capacity for obtaining the materials of growth, in this case materials for the growth of intellect, of imagination, of the will, of the emotions. It means, therefore, capacity of seeing many facts, of meditating, of feeling deeply, and of controlling such feeling. It implies the avoidance of injuries which interfere with growth, escape from enemies which bring life to a sudden end, and therefore strength, and skill, and prudence in dealing with the world. It implies a power in the organism of fitting its movements to meet numerous external co-existences and sequences. In a word, we are brought back once again to Shakspeare's resolute fidelity to the fact. By virtue of this his life became a success, as far as success is permitted to such a creature as man in such a world as the present.

It seems much that the needy youth who left his native town probably under pressure of poverty, should at the age of thirty-three have become possessor of New Place at Stratford, and from year to year have added to his worldly dignity and wealth. Such material advancement argues a power of understanding, and adapting oneself to the facts of the material world. But that was not the chief success in the life of Shakspeare. When Wordsworth

* See the valuable criticism of Shakspeare's style as contrasted with Fletcher's in "A letter on Shakspeare's Authorship of 'The Two Noble Kinsmen,'" 1833 (by Mr Spalding), pp 13-18. The criticism applies with special propriety to Shakspeare's later style.

† In my answer to this question, I borrow several expressions from Herbert Spencer's *Biology*.

thought of "mighty poets in their misery dead," when in sudden mood of dejection he murmured to himself,

We poets in our youth begin in gladness,
But thereof comes in the end despondency and madness,

he thought of Chatterton and of Burns, not of Shakspeare. The early contemporaries of Shakspeare—Marlowe and Greene—one of them a man of splendid genius, failed as Chatterton failed. It must have appeared to Shakspeare (who well enough understood honest frolic) a poor affair, a flimsy kind of idealism—this reckless knocking of a man's head against the solid laws of the universe. The protest against fact, against our subjection to law made by such men as Marlowe and Greene, was a vulgar and superficial protest. Shakspeare could get no delight from the insanity of sowing wild oats. His insanity was of a far graver and more terrible kind. It assumed two forms—the Romeo form and the Hamlet form—abandonment to passion, abandonment to brooding thought—two diseases of youth, each fatal in its own way, two forms of the one supreme crime in Shakspeare's eyes, want of fidelity to the fact. The noble practical energy of Shakspeare was tempted to self-betrayal on the one hand by the supremacy of blind desire, on the other hand, by the sapping in of thought upon the will and active powers. The struggle between self-will and reason, between "blood" and "judgment," appears in all his writings to be ever in the back-ground, a theme ready at any moment, if permitted, to become prominent. And Shakspeare's profoundest and most sympathetic psychological study—Hamlet—represents in detail the other chief temptation

to which he was, it would seem, subjected. In all the later plays his eye is intently fixed upon the deep insoluble questions suggested by human character and destiny, fixed with a brooding wistfulness, which yet, we perceive, he became, as years went on, more and more able to control

Shakspeare's central self pronounced in favour of sanity—in favour of seeing things as they are, and shaping life accordingly. He bought up houses and lands in Stratford, and so made a protest superficial, indeed, yet real, against the Romeo and the Hamlet within him. But the idealist within him made Shakspeare at all times far other than a mere country magnate or wealthy burgher. It remained, after all, *near*ly the deepest part of him —

Hamlet Is not parchment made of sheep-skins?

Horatio Ay, my lord, and of calf-skins too

Hamlet They are sheep and calves which seek out assurance in that.

And Prospero declares the end of the whole matter —

We are such stuff 6

As dreams are made on, and our little life

Is rounded with a sleep

Shakspeare's devotion to material interests was the least part of the protest made against his temptation to extravagance of soul. There are more important facts than those of the material life. Shakspeare cast his plummet into the sea of human sorrow, and wrong, and loss. He studied evil. He would let none of that dark side of life escape from him. He denied none of the bitterness, the sins, the calamity of the world. He looked steadily

at Cordelia strangled in the arms of Lear, and he summoned up a strenuous fortitude, a stoical submission to make endurable such a spectacle. But at the same time he retained his loyalty to good, over against Edmund and the monstrous sisters he saw the invincible loyalty of a Kent, the practical genius of an Edgar in the service of good, and the redeeming ardour of a Cordelia. Rescuing his soul from all bitterness, he arrived finally at a temper strong and self-possessed as that of stoicism, yet free from the stoical attitude of defiance, a temper liberal, gracious, charitable, a tender yet strenuous calm.

The "Venus and Adonis" is styled by its author in the dedication to the Earl of Southampton, "the first heir of my invention." Gervinus believes that the poem may have been written before the poet left Stratford. Although possibly separated by a considerable interval from its companion poem "The Rape of Lucrece" (1594), the two may be regarded as essentially one in kind*. The speciality of these poems as portions of Shakspeare's art has perhaps not been sufficiently observed†. Each is an artistic study, and they form, as has been just observed, companion studies—one of female lust and

* Mr Furnivall notes in the *Venus and Adonis* the following pictures from Shakspeare's youthful life at Stratford,—the horse (l 260 318), the hare-hunt (l 763-768), the overflowing Avon (72), the two silver doves (366), the milch doe and fawn in some brake in Charlecote Park (875 6), the red morn (453), the hush of the wind before it rains (458), the many clouds consulting for foul weather (972), the night owl (531), the lark (853). The *Lucrece*, he adds, "must have been written some time after the 'Venus,' as its proportion of unstopt lines is 1 in 10 81 (171 such lines to the poem's l 1855) against the 'Venus's' 1 in 25 40 (47 run on lines in 1,194)." Preface by F. J. Furnivall to *Shakespeare Commentaries* by Gervinus (ed 1874).

† Coleridge touches upon the fact, and it is noted by Lloyd

boyish coldness, the other of male lust and womanly chastity Coleridge noticed "the utter aloofness of the poet's own feelings from those of which he is at once the painter and the analyst," but it can hardly be admitted that this aloofness of the poet's own feelings proceeds from a dramatic abandonment of self The subjects of these two poems did not call and choose their poet, they did not possess him and compel him to render them into art Rather, the poet expressly made choice of the subjects, and deliberately set himself down before each to accomplish an exhaustive study of it

If the Venus and Adonis sonnets in "The Passionate Pilgrim" be by Shakspeare, it would seem that he had been trying various poetical exercises on this theme And for a young writer of the Renaissance, the subject of Shakspeare's earliest poem was a splendid one,—as voluptuous and unspiritual as that of a classical picture by Titian It included two figures containing inexhaustible pasture for the fleshly eye, and delicacies and dainties for the sensuous imagination of the Renaissance,—the enamoured Queen of Beauty, and the beautiful, disdainful boy It afforded occasion for endless exercises and variations on the themes,—Beauty, Lust, and Death In holding the subject before his imagination Shakspeare is perfectly cool and collected. He has made choice of the subject, and he is interested in doing his duty by it in the most thorough way a young poet can, but he remains unimpassioned,—intent wholly upon getting down the right colours and lines upon his canvas Observe his determination to put in accurately the details of each object, to omit nothing Poor Wat, the hare, is described in a

dozen stanzas Another series of stanzas describes the stallion , all his points are enumerated —

Round-hoof'd, short-jointed, fetlocks shag and long,
Broad breast, full eye, small head and nostril wide,
High crest, short ears, straight legs and passing strong,
Thin mane, thick tail, broad buttock, tender hide

. This passage of poetry has been admired but is it poetry or a paragraph from an advertisement of a horse sale ? It is part of Shakspeare's study of an animal, and he does his work thoroughly In like manner he does not shrink from faithfully putting down each one of the amorous provocations and urgencies of Venus The complete series of manœuvres must be detailed

In "Lucrece" the action is delayed and delayed that every minute particular may be described, every minor incident recorded In the newness of her suffering and shame Lucrece finds time for an elaborate *tirade* appropriate to the theme "Night," another to that of "Time," another to that of "Opportunity" Each topic is exhausted Then studiously a new incident is introduced, and its significance for the emotions is drained to the last drop in a new tirade We nowhere else discover Shakspeare so evidently engaged upon his work Afterwards he puts a stress upon his verses to compel them to contain the hidden wealth of his thought and imagination Here he displays at large such wealth as he possesses, he will have none of it half seen The descriptions and declamations are unhamatic, but they shew us the materials laid out in detail from which dramatic poetry originates Having drawn so carefully from models, the time comes when he can trust himself to draw from

memory, and he possesses marvellous freedom of hand, because his previous studies have been so laborious. It was the same hand that drew the stallion in *Venus and Adonis*, which afterwards drew with infallible touch, as though they were alive, the dogs of Theseus —

My hounds are bred out of the Spartan kind
So flew'd, so sanded, and their heads are hung
With ears that sweep away the morning dew,
Crook-kneed, and dew-lapped like Thessalian bulls
Slow in pursuit, but match'd in mouth like bells, ϵ
Each under each. A cry more tuneable
Was never holla'd to, nor cheer'd with horn
In Crete, in Sparta, nor in Thessaly *

When these poems were written Shakspeare was

* The comparison of these two passages is from Hazlitt, whose unfavourable criticism of Shakspeare's poems expresses well one side of the truth "The two poems of *Venus and Adonis*, and of *Tarquin and Lucrece*, appear to us like a couple of ice-houses. They are about as hard, as glittering, and as cold. The author seems all the time to be thinking of his verses, and not of his subject—not of what his characters would feel, but of what he shall say, and as it must happen in all such cases he always puts into their mouths those things which they would be the last to think of, and which it shows the greatest ingenuity in him to find out. The whole is laboured up hill work. The poet is perpetually singling out the difficulties of the art to make an exhibition of his strength and skill in wrestling with them. He is making perpetual trials of them as if his mastery over them were doubted.

A beautiful thought is sure to be lost in an endless commentary upon it.

There is besides a strange attempt to substitute the language of painting for that of poetry, to make us see their feelings in the faces of the persons "Characters of Shakspeare's Plays (ed 1818), pp 348 49 Coleridge's much more favourable criticism will be found in *Biographia Literaria*, vol II, Chap II. (ed. 1847) The peculiarity of the poems last noticed in the extract from Hazlitt is ingeniously accounted for by Coleridge "The great instinct which impelled the poet to the drama was secretly working in him, prompting him to provide a substitute for that visual language, that constant intervention and running comment by tone, look, and gesture, which in his dramatic works he was entitled to expect from the players," pp 18, 19

cautiously feeling his way Large, slow-growing natures, gifted with a sense of concrete fact and with humour, ordinarily possess no great self-confidence in youth An idealist, like Milton, may resolve in early manhood that he will achieve a great epic poem, and in old age may turn into fact the ideas of his youth An idealist, like Marlowe, may begin his career with a splendid youthful audacity, a stupendous "Tamburlaine" A man of the kind to which Shakspeare belonged, although very resolute, and determined, if possible, to succeed, requires the evidence of objective facts to give him self-confidence His special virtue lies in a peculiarly pregnant and rich relation with the actual world, and such relation commonly establishes itself by a gradual process Accordingly, instead of flinging abroad into the world while still a stripling some unprecedented creation, as Marlowe did, or as Victor Hugo did, and securing thereby the position of a leader of an insurgent school, Shakspeare began, if not timidly, at least cautiously and tentatively He undertakes work of any and every description, and tries and tests himself upon all He is therefore a valued person in his theatrical company, ready to turn his hand to anything helpful, a Jack of all trades, a "Johannes factotum," he is obliging and free from self-assertion, he is waiting his time; he is not yet sure of himself, he finds it the sensible thing not to profess singularity "Divers of worship" report his "uprightness of dealing," he is "excellent in the quality he professes,"* his demeanour

* On the special use of the word "quality" for the stage player's profession see a note by Hermann Kurz in his article "Shakespeare der Schauspieler"—*Shakespeare Jahrbuch*, vol vi, pp 317, 318

is civil, he is recognized even already as having a "facetious grace in writing"* . Let us not suppose because Shakspeare declines to assault the real world, and the world of imagination, and take them by violence, that he is therefore a person of slight force of character. He is determined to master both these worlds if possible. He approaches them with a facile and engaging air, by and by his grasp upon facts will tighten. From Marlowe and from Milton half of the world escapes. Shakspeare will lay hold of it in its totality, and once that he has laid hold of it, will never let it go.

This is the period of Shakspeare's tentative dramatic efforts. Among these, notwithstanding strong external evidence,—the testimony of Meres, and the fact that Heminge and Condell included the play in the first folio,—it is difficult to admit *Titus Andronicus*. That tragedy belongs to the pre-Shaksperian school of bloody dramas. If any portions of it be from Shakspeare's hand, it has at least this interest—it shows that there was a period of Shakspeare's authorship when the poet had not yet discovered himself, a period when he yielded to the popular influences of the day and hour. This much interest and no more. That Shakspeare himself entered with passion or energy into the literary movement which the Spanish Tragedy of Kyd may be taken to represent, his other early writings forbid us to believe. The supposed *Sturm und Drang* period of Shakspeare's artistic

* Chettle's *Kind Heart's Dream*, 1592. But see Mr Howard Staunton's letter in *The Athenæum*, Feb 7th, 1874, Mr Simpson's article, "Shakspeare Allusion Books"—*The Academy*, April 11, 1874, and Dr Ingledby's preface to "Shakspeare Allusion Books," published for the New Shakspeare Society.

career exists only in the imagination of his German critics. The early years of Shakspeare's authorship were years of bright and tender play of fancy and of feeling. If an epoch of storm and stress at any time arrived, it was when Shakspeare's genius had reached its full maturity, and *Lear* was the product of that epoch. But *then*, if the storm and stress were prolonged and urgent, Shakspeare possessed sufficient power of endurance, and had obtained sufficient grasp of the strong sure roots of life to save him from being borne away into the chaos or in any direction across the borders of the ordered realm of art. Upon the whole, *Titus Andronicus* may be disregarded. Even if it were a work of Shakspeare we should still call it un-Shaksperian. "Shakspeare's tragedy," Gerald Massey has truly said, "is the tragedy of Terror, this is the tragedy of Horror. It reeks blood, it smells of blood, we almost feel that we have handled blood—it is so gross. The mental stain is not whitened by Shakspeare's sweet springs of pity, the horror is not hallowed by that appalling sublimity with which he invested his chosen ministers of death. It is tragedy only in the coarsest material relationships"*

Of *Pericles* the portion written by Shakspeare—the lovely little romance which Mr Fleay has separated

* Shakspeare's Sonnets and his Private Friends, p 581. Kreyssig, who accepts *Titus Andronicus* as an early work of Shakspeare, gives an elaborate study of the play. For matters of external evidence, &c, consult the article by H. Kurz in *Shakespeare Jahrbuch*, vol v, and on characteristics of metre, the preface by Hertzberg in Schlegel's and Tieck's translation, edited by members of the German Shakespeare Society. See also Mr Albert Cohn's "*Shakespeare in Germany*," p cxii.

from the coarse work of Rowley and Wilkins, and named "Marina,"—belongs to the period of Shakspeare's maturity, after 1600. Rowley's work "is always detached and splits off from his coadjutors' with a clean cleavage. In Fletcher's *Maid of the Mill* the work of the two men might be published as two separate plays."² Similarly in the play *A Cure for a Cuckold*, the work of Rowley splits off from that of Webster, leaving the little drama which Mr Gosse claims the honour of having delivered out of the compound manufacture of the two authors, and which he has gracefully entitled *Love's Graduate*†

Setting aside *Titus Andronicus* and "Marina," four dramatic experiments by Shakspeare remain, each in a different manner from the rest. First, a portion at least of the second and third parts of *King Henry VI*—English historical drama‡. The *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, a comedy of graceful mirth and sprightly and tender feeling, with the interest of love predominant, *Love's Labour's Lost*, a comedy of dialogue, a piece of airy satire, with an underlying serious intention, the *Comedy of Errors*, a comedy of incident, of almost farcical adventure—the sole attempt of Shakspeare at imitation of the comic drama of ancient Rome. In this

* Transactions of the New Shakspeare Society, part 1. On the play of *Pericles*, by the Rev F G Fleay

† *Fraser's Magazine*, May 1874. "John Webster," by Edmund W. Gosse

‡ In Mr R Grant White's Essay upon the authorship of *Henry VI*, he argues that the early *Contention* and the *True Tragedie* contain portions by Shakspeare, afterwards transferred to his *Henry VI*, Parts II and III, and that the remaining portions are by Marlowe, Greene, and Peele. But see note, pp 97, 98

play Shakspeare gaily confronts improbabilities, and requires the spectator to accept them. He adds to the twins Antipholus the twins Dromio. If we are in for improbability, let us at least be repaid for it by fun, and have that in abundance. Let the incredible become a twofold incredibility, and it is none the worse*. We may conclude that, while Shakspeare was ready to try his hand upon a farcical subject, a single experiment satisfied him that this was not his province, for to such subjects he never returned.

During the years in which the poet was experimenting in history, comedy, and farce, that about which he was most of all secretly concerned was a tragedy—a tragedy of a kind altogether different from Titus Andronicus, and the group of bloody plays to which it belongs. Such a graceful piece of comedy as *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* did not profoundly engage his imagination. If the fifth act came from Shakspeare's pen as it now stands, we must believe that he handed over his play to the actors while a portion of it still remained only a hasty sketch, the *dénouement* being left for future working out†. But the

* The source of this comedy is usually said to be a translation of the *Menæchmi* of Plautus, by W. Warner Hertzberg, in his preface to the play in the German Shakspeare Society's edition of Schlegel's and Tieck's translation, carefully distinguishes the characters and incidents which Shakspeare did *not* owe to the *Menæchmi*. In the article "*Zwei neuentdeckte Shakespearequellen*" (*Die Literatur*, January 16, 1874), the writer, Dr Paul Wislicenus, points out another source in the *Amphitruo*. His supposition that the incident of the storm in the *Comedy of Errors* is derived from the storm in *Pericles*, must be set aside as untenable. Shakspeare's acquaintance with the *Amphitruo* may have been made, in the first instance, through the rude English imitation of Plautus' comedy, "*Jack Juggler*."

† Hertzberg is of opinion that either the play was re-handled and ••

designed tragedy seems to have been the great affair of his literary career at this period. It is the opinion of Dyce, of Grant White, and of others, that Shakspeare began to work upon *Romeo and Juliet* not later than about 1591, that is, according to the commonly received chronology, almost at the moment when he began to write for the stage, and that having occupied him for a series of years, the tragedy assumed its present form about 1595-97. If this be the case, and if, as there is reason to believe, Shakspeare was also during many years interested in the subject of *Hamlet*, we discover a fact, which is characteristic of the poet, that he accepted the knowledge that his powers were undeveloped, and acted upon it, waiting with his two chosen subjects—the story of the star-crossed lovers, and the story of the man summoned to action whose will was sapped—until he

cut down by some Elizabethan playwright, or our text was imperfectly made up from copies of the parts of the several actors. If either of these hypotheses be correct, we are not in possession of Shakspeare's complete play. The words addressed by Valentine to Proteus (*Act v, Scene 4*), "All that is mine in Sylvia I give thee," cannot be an interpolation, for they are needed to account for Julia's fainting. Were they spoken by Valentine to test the loyalty of his professedly repentant friend? And is there a gap here, originally occupied by speeches of Proteus and Sylvia? See Hertzberg's preface in the German Shakspeare Society's edition of Schlegel's and Tieck's translation. Hertzberg (relying partly on metrical evidence) assigns a later place to *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* in the succession of Shakspeare's plays than that usually assigned by critics. I remain unconvinced by the arguments for lateness of date. See on this subject a lecture by Mr Hales reported in *The Academy*, January 31, 1874, and Mr Furnivall's criticism of the paper by Rev F G Fleay in *Transactions of the New Shakspeare Society*, 1874. Having made out the group of Shakspeare's early comedies, it does not greatly matter, for the purposes of the present study, in what order the plays followed one another within the group, but I incline towards placing *A Midsummer Night's Dream* last.

believed himself competent to do justice to his conceptions. What a contrast is presented by this waiting of genius, this patience "until the golden couplets are disclosed," to the feverish eagerness of Marlowe to appease his ambition, and unburden himself of the pressure of his imagination.

• As characteristic of these early plays, we may notice,* (i), frequency of rhyme, in various arrangements, (a), rhymed couplets, (b), rhymed quatrains, (c), the sextain, consisting of an alternately rhyming quatrain, followed by a couplet (the arrangement of the last six lines of Shakspeare's sonnets) (ii), Occurrence of rhymed doggerel verse in two forms, (a), very short lines, and (b), very long lines (iii), Comparative infrequency of the feminine (or double) ending, (iv), comparative infrequency of the weak-ending, (v), comparative infrequency of the unstopped line, (vi), regular internal structure of the line, extra syllables seldom packed into the verse, (vii), frequency of classical allusions, (viii), frequency of puns and conceits, (ix), wit and imagery drawn out in detail to the point of exhaustion, (x), clowns who are, by comparison with the later comic characters, outstanding persons in the play told off specially for clownage, (xi), the presence of termagant or shrewish women, (xii), soliloquies addressed rather to the audience (to explain the business of the piece or the motives of the actors), than to the speaker's self, (xiii), symmetry in the grouping of persons.

To illustrate the last of these characteristics—and each

* See on this subject a lecture by Mr Hales, reported in *The Academy*, January 17th, 1874.

apparently mechanical thing as the stopping of a passage of verse is not mechanical, but in its essence spiritual. At first when we resolve to live a life somewhat higher than the common life of vulgar accident, we do well to put ourselves under a system of rules and precepts, through strict observance of these we shall secure in a certain degree the ideality our life has need of. But in due time we fling away our manuals, our codes of spiritual drill, our little rules and restrictions. A deeper order takes authority over our being, and resumes in itself the narrower order, the rhythm of our life acquires a larger harmony, a movement free and yet sure as that of nature. In like manner, a thought at first endeavours to secure ideality for its life by adherence to a system of narrow rule. This is the explanation of the early manner of all great writers of verse, all great painters, and musicians, as compared with their later manner. Their style becomes free and daring, because the great facts of the world have now taken hold of them, and because their subjection to highest law is at length complete. They and their work are as free as the winds, or as the growing grass, or as the waves, or the drift of clouds, or the motion of the stars. As free, that is to say in complete, noble, and glad subjection.

Love's Labour's Lost, if we do not assign that place to The Two Gentlemen of Verona, is the first independent, wholly original work of Shakspeare. Mr Charles Knight named it "The Comedy of Affectations," and that title aptly interprets one intention of the play. It is a satirical extravaganza embodying Shakspeare's criticism upon contemporary fashions and foibles in speech, in

manners, and in literature This probably more than any other of the plays of Shakspeare suffers through lapse of time. Fantastical speech, pedantic learning, extravagant love-hyperbole, frigid fervours in poetry, against each of these, with the brightness and vivacity of youth, confident in the success of its cause, Shakspeare directs the light artillery of his wit Being young and clever, he is absolutely devoid of respect for nonsense, whether it be dainty, affected nonsense, or grave unconscious nonsense

But over and above this, there is a serious intention in the play It is a protest against youthful schemes of shaping life according to notions rather than according to reality, a protest against idealizing away the facts of life The play is chiefly interesting as containing Shakspeare's confession of faith with respect to the true principles of self-culture The King of Navarre and his young lords had resolved for a definite period of time to circumscribe their beings and their lives with a little code of rules They had designed to enclose a little favoured park in which ideas should rule to the exclusion of the blind and rude forces of nature They were pleased to rearrange human character and human life, so that it might accord with their idealistic scheme of self-development The court was to be a little Academe, no woman was to be looked at for the space of three years, food and sleep were to be placed under precise regulation And the result is, what? That human nature refuses to be dealt with in this fashion of arbitrary selection and rejection The youthful idealists had supposed that they would form a little group of select and refined ascetics of

knowledge and culture, it was quickly proved that they were men. The play is Shaksperc's declaration in favour of the fact as it is. Here, he says, we are with such and such appetites and passions. Let us in any scheme of self-development get *that* fact acknowledged at all events. Otherwise, we shall quickly enough betray ourselves as arrant fools, fit to be flouted by women, and needing to learn from them a portion of their directness, practicality, and good sense.

And yet the Princess, and Rosaline, and Maria, have not the entire advantage on their side. It is well to be practical, but to be practical, and also to have a capacity for ideas is better. Berowne, the exponent of Shaksperc's own thought, who entered into the youthful, idealistic project of his friends with a satisfactory assurance that the time would come when the entire dream-structure would tumble ridiculously about the ears of them all,—Berowne is yet a larger nature than the Princess or Rosaline. His good sense is the good sense of a thinker and of a man of action. When he is most flouted and bemocked, we yet acknowledge him victorious and the master, and Rosaline will confess the fact by and by.

In the midst of merriment and nonsense comes a sudden and grievous incursion of fact full of pain. The father of the Princess is dead. All the world is not mirth—"this side is Hiems, Winter, this Ver, the Spring." The lovers must part, "Jack hath not his Jill," and to engrave the lesson deeply, which each heart needs, the king and two of his companions are dismissed for a twelvemonth to learn the difference between reality and unreality, while Berowne, who has known the mirth of

represented in midsummer—the midsummer, perhaps, of 1594. The imagined season of the action of the play is the beginning of May, for according to the magnificent piece of mediæval-classical mythology embodied here, and in the *Knights Tale* of Chaucer, and again in the *Two Noble Kinsmen* of Shakspeare and Fletcher, this was the month of Theseus' marriage with his Amazonian bride*. In like manner the play of *Twelfth Night* received its name probably because it was first enacted at that season of festivity, and as if to declare more emphatically that it shall be nameless, Shakspeare adds a second title *Twelfth Night, or What you will*, that is (for we need seek no deeper significance)—*Twelfth Night, or anything you like to call it*. A *Midsummer Night's Dream* was written on the occasion of the marriage of some noble couple—possibly for the marriage of the poet's patron Southampton with Elizabeth Vernon, as Mr Gerald Massey supposes, possibly at an earlier date to do honour to the marriage of the Earl of Essex with Lady Sidney†.

* Titania says to Oberon, *Act II, Scene I,*

And never since the middle summer's spring
Met we on hill, in dale, forest, or mead, &c

Perhaps a night in early May might be considered a night in the spring of midsummer.

† Mr Massey is obliged to entertain the supposition that the play was written some time before the marriage actually took place (1598), "at a period when it may have been thought the Queen's consent could be obtained. I have ventured the date of 1595." Shakspeare's *Sonnets and his Private Friends*, p 481. Professor Karl Elze's theory, maintained in a highly ingenious paper in *Shakspeare Jahrbuch*, vol. II, that the play was written for the marriage of the young Earl of Essex, would throw back the date to 1590, a good deal too early I believe. Prof. Elze has, however, much to say in favour of this opinion. See also the excellent article by Hermann Kurz in *Shakspeare*

The central figure of the play is that of Theseus. There is no figure in the early drama of Shakspeare so magnificent. His are the large hands that have helped to shape the world. His utterance is the rich-toned speech of one who is master of events—who has never known a shrill or eager feeling. His nuptial day is at hand, and while the other lovers are agitated, bewildered, incensed, Theseus, who does not think of himself as a lover but rather as a beneficent conqueror, remains in calm possession of his joy. Theseus, a grand ideal figure, is to be studied as Shakspeare's conception of the heroic man of action in his hour of enjoyment and of leisure. With a splendid capacity for enjoyment, gracious to all, ennobled by the glory, implied rather than explicit, of great foregone achievement, he stands as centre of the poem, giving their true proportions to the fairy tribe upon the one hand, and upon the other to the "human mortals." The heroic men of action, Theseus, Henry V, Hector,—are supremely admired by Shakspeare. Yet it is observable that as the total Shakspeare is superior to Romeo, the man given over to passion, and to Hamlet, the man given over to thought, so the Hamlet and the Romeo within him give Shakspeare an infinite advantage over even the most heroic men of action. He admires these

Jahrbuch, vol. iv. Illustrations of the Fairy Mythology of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* will be found in the volume by Halliwell bearing that name, issued by the Shakespeare Society (1845), and also in *Shakspeare-Forschungen*, ii., *Nachklänge Germanischer Mythe*, by Benno Tschluschwitz (1868). Mr Halpin's exceedingly ingenious study of Oberon's Vision interprets that celebrated passage as having reference to Leicester's intrigue with Lettice, daughter of Sir Francis Knollys, and wife of Walter Devereux, Earl of Essex.

men of action supremely, but he admires them from an outside point of view "These fellows of infinite tongue," says Henry, wooing the French princess, "that can rhyme themselves into ladies' favours, they do always reason themselves out again What! a speaker is but a prater, a rhyme is but a ballad" It is into Theseus' mouth that Shakspeare puts the words which class together "the lunatic, the lover, and the poet" as of imagination all compact That is the touch, which shows how Shakspeare stood off from Theseus, did not identify himself with this grand ideal (which he admired so truly), and admitted to himself a secret superiority of his own soul over that of this noble master of the world

Comments by Shakspeare upon his own art are not so numerous that we can afford to overlook them It must here be noted that Shakspeare makes the "palpable gross" interlude of the Athenian mechanicals serve as an indirect apology for his own necessarily imperfect attempt to represent fairy land, and the majestic world of heroic life Maginn writes, "When Hippolyta speaks scornfully of the tragedy in which Bottom holds so conspicuous a part, Theseus answers that the best of this kind" [scenic performances] "are but shadows, and the worst no worse, if imagination amend them She answers" [for Hippolyta has none of Theseus' indulgence towards inefficiency, but rather a woman's intolerance of the absurd], "that it must be *your* imagination then, not *theirs*" He retorts with a joke on the vanity of actors, and the conversation is immediately changed The meaning of the Duke is that, however we may laugh at

now his self-mastery has increased, and therefore with unfeigned satisfaction he presents Theseus, the master of the world, who, having beauty and heroic strength in actual possession does not need to summon them to occupy his imagination—the great chieftain to whom art is a very small concern of life, fit for a leisure hour between battle and battle. Theseus, who has nothing antique or Grecian about him, is an idealized study from the life. Perhaps he is idealized Essex, perhaps idealized Southampton. Perhaps some night a dramatic company was ordered to perform in presence of a great Elizabethan noble—we know not whom—who needed to entertain his guests, and there, in a moment of fine imaginative vision, the poet discovered Theseus.

A Midsummer Night's Dream is, as its name implies, a phantasmagory, a mask of shadows full of marvel, surprises, splendour, and grotesqueness. But during the same years in which Shakspeare was writing his comedies, and while he was engaged upon his first great tragedy, he continued also steadily at work upon his series of English historical plays. The culture afforded to Shakspeare by the writing of these plays was highly important at that precise period of his career. The substantial matter, upon which he was engaged, served to extend and consolidate that relation which was establishing itself slowly but surely between the imagination of the dramatist and the actual world. The tough clay of historical fact did not take artistic shape too readily, and his hands were strengthened by the labour of moulding it into form. In treating historical subjects, moreover, unrealities of every kind must be sternly set aside, no

graceful poetical phrasing, no delicate conceits, no quips and cranks of wit, Shakspeare perceived, would compensate here for want of fidelity to the essential truth of things. Then, again, if in writing *Romeo and Juliet* Shakspeare ran a certain risk of abandoning his genius over much to lyrical intensity, the culture afforded by the historical dramas acted as a safeguard. If in his early comedies Shakspeare relied upon symmetry of arrangement for securing unity of design, here such symmetry was obviously unattainable, and he must look for a deeper ground of unity.

But the most important influence exercised by his dramatic studies in English history upon the mind of Shakspeare was that they engaged his imagination in an inquiry into the sources of power and of weakness, of success and of failure in a man's dealing with the positive, social world. They kept constantly before Shakspeare's mind the problem, "How is a man to obtain a mastery of the actual world, and in what ways may he fail of such mastery?" This was a subject in which Shakspeare had a personal interest, for he was himself resolved, as far as in him lay, not to fail in this material life of ours, but rather, if possible, to be for his own needs a master of events. The portraits of English kings from King John to King Henry V are a series of studies of weakness and of strength for the attaining of kingly ends. To fail is the supreme sin. Worse almost than criminality is weakness, except that crime besides being crime, is itself a certain kind of weakness. Henry VI is a timid saint, it were better that he had been a man. Does his timid saintliness

serve him in the place of energy of thought and will, or secure him from a miserable overthrow? It is important to observe the fundamental difference which exists between the series of English historical plays and the great series of tragedies, beginning with Hamlet, ending with Timon of Athens, in which Shakspeare embodied his ripest experience of life. In the historical plays the question which inevitably comes forward again and again is this, "By what means shall a man attain the noblest practical success in the objective world?" In the great tragedies the problem is a spiritual one. It is still the problem of failure and success. But in these tragedies success means not any practical achievement in the world, but the perfected life of the soul, and failure means the ruin of the life of a soul through passion or weakness, through calamity or crime.

The historical plays lead up to Henry V, in the chronological succession of Shakspeare's plays the last of the series. The tragedies lead up to *The Tempest*, which closes Shakspeare's entire career as dramatist. Gervinus has spoken of King Henry V as if he were Shakspeare's ideal of highest manhood, and other critics have assented to this opinion. It is an opinion which, stated in an unqualified way, must be set aside as not warranted by the facts of Shakspeare's dramas. But it is clear and unquestionable that King Henry V is Shakspeare's ideal of the *practical* heroic character. He is the king who will not fail. He will not fail as the saintly Henry VI failed, nor as Richard II failed, a hectic, self-indulgent nature, a mockery king of pageantry, and sentiment, and rhetoric, nor will he only partially succeed by prudential devices, and strata-

gems, and crimes, like his father, "great Bolingbroke" The success of Henry V will be sound throughout, and it will be complete With his glorious practical virtues, his courage, his integrity, his unfaltering justice, his hearty English warmth, his modesty, his love of plainness rather than of pageantry, his joyous temper, his business-like English piety, Henry is indeed the ideal of the king who must attain a success complete, and thoroughly real and sound.

But is this practical, positive, efficient character, with his soldier-like piety and his jolly fashion of wooing, is this the highest ideal of our supreme poet? [Is this the highest ideal of Shakspeare, who lived, and moved, and had his being not alone in the world of limitation, of tangible, positive fact, but also in a world of the soul, a world opening into two endless vistas, the vista of meditation and the vista of passion Assuredly it is not so We turn to the great tragedies, and what do we there discover? In these Shakspeare is engaged in a series of studies not concerning success in the mastery of events and things, but concerning the higher success and the more awful failure which appear in the exaltation or the ruin of a soul. This with Shakspeare is the true theme of tragedy Having exhibited various calamity overtaking the being and essential life of man, calamity commonly arising from flaws of character which disclose themselves and become formidable in the test of circumstances, having shown in Macbeth, in Antony, in Othello, in Coriolanus the ruin of character in greater or less degree, Shakspeare represented absolute, overwhelming, irre-

trievable ruin in *Timon of Athens*, a play written probably not long before the *Tempest*. And, after exhibiting the absolute ruin of a life and of a soul, Shakspeare closed the wonderful series of his dramatic writings by exhibiting the noblest elevation of character, the most admirable attainment of heart, of intellect, of will, which our present life admits, in the person of *Prospero*. What more was left for Shakspeare to say? Is it so very strange that he accepted as a good possession the calm energy of his Stratford life, having at last wholly liberated his mind?

Shakspeare, when he had completed his English historical plays, needed rest for his imagination, and in such a mood, craving refreshment and recreation, he wrote his play of *As You Like It*. To understand the spirit of this play, we must bear in mind that it was written immediately after Shakspeare's great series of histories, ending with *Henry V* (1590), and before he began the great series of tragedies. Shakspeare turned with a sense of relief, and a long easeful sigh, from the oppressive subjects of history, so grave, so real, so massive, and found rest and freedom and pleasure in escape from courts and camps to the Forest of Arden.

Who doth ambition shun,
And loves to live i' the sun,
Come hither, come hither, come hither

In somewhat the same spirit needing relief for an overstrained imagination he wrote his other pastoral drama, *The Winter's Tale*, immediately or almost immediately after *Timon of Athens*. In each case he chose a graceful story in great part made ready to his hand, from

among the prose writings of his early contemporaries, Thomas Lodge and Robert Greene. Like the banished Duke, Shakspeare himself found the forest life of Arden more sweet than that of painted pomp, a life "exempt from public haunt," in a quiet retreat, where for turbulent citizens, the deer, "poor dappled fools," are the only native burghers.

The play has been represented by one of its recent editors as an early attempt made by the poet to control the dark spirit of melancholy in himself "by thinking it away." The characters of the banished Duke, of Orlando, of Rosalind are described as three gradations of cheerfulness in adversity, with Jacques placed over against them in designed contrast*. But no real adversity has come to any one of them. Shakspeare, when he put into the Duke's mouth the words, "Sweet are the uses of adversity," knew something of deeper affliction than a life in the golden leisure of Arden. Of real melancholy there is none in the play, for the melancholy of Jacques is not grave and earnest, but sentimental, a self-indulgent humour, a petted foible of character, melancholy prepense and cultivated, "it is a melancholy of mine own, compounded of many simples, extracted from many objects, and indeed the sundry contemplation of my travels, in which my often rumination wraps me in a most humorous sadness." The Duke declares that Jacques has been "a libertine, as sensual as the brutish sting itself," but the Duke is unable to understand such a character as that of

* As you Like it, edited by the Rev C E Moberly (1872), pp 79

Jacques.* Jacques has been no more than a curious experimenter in libertinism, for the sake of adding an experience of madness and folly to the store of various superficial experiences which constitute his unpractical foolery of wisdom. The haunts of sin have been visited as a part of his travel. By and by he will go to the usurping Duke who has put on a religious life, because

Out of these convertites

There is much matter to be heard and learned

Jacques died, we know not how, or when, or where, but he came to life again a century later, and appeared in the world as an English clergyman, we need stand in no doubt as to his character, for we all know him under his later name of Lawrence Sterne. Mr Yorick made a mistake about his family tree, he came not out of the play of Hamlet, but out of As You Like It. In Arden he wept and moralised over the wounded deer, and at Nampont his tears and sentiment gushed forth for the dead donkey. Jacques knows no bonds that unite him to any living thing. He lives upon novel, curious, and delicate sensations. He seeks the delicious *impévu* so loved and studiously sought for by that perfected French egoist, Henri Beyle. "A fool! a fool! I met a fool in the forest!"—and in the delight of coming upon this exquisite surprise, Jacques laughs like chanticleer,

Sans intermission

An hour by his dial.

* The Duke accordingly repels Jacques. Jacques—"I have been all this day to avoid him, he is too disputable for my company, I think of as many matters as he, but I give heaven thanks, and make no boast of them."

His whole life is unsubstantial and unreal, a curiosity of dainty mockery. To him "all the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players," to him sentiment stands in place of passion, an æsthetic, amateurish experience of various modes of life stands in place of practical wisdom, and words, in place of deeds.

"He fatigues me," wrote our earnest and sensitive Thackeray of the Jacques of English literature, "with his perpetual disquiet and his uneasy appeals to my visible or sentimental faculties. He is always looking in my face, watching his effect, uncertain whether I think him an impostor or not, posture-making, coaxing, and imploring me. 'See what sensibility I have—own now that I'm very clever—do cry now, you can't resist this'." Yes, for Jacques was at his best in the Forest of Arden, and was a little spoiled by preaching weekly sermons, and by writing so long a caprice as his *Tristram Shandy*. Shakspeare has given us just enough of Jacques, and not too much, and in his undogmatic, artistic, tender, playful, and yet earnest manner upon Jacques Shakspeare has pronounced judgment. Falstaff supposed that by infinite play of wit, and inexhaustible resource of a genius creative of splendid mendacity, he could coruscate away the facts of life, and always remain master of the situation by giving it a clever turn in the idea, or by playing over it with an arabesque of arch waggery.

I know thee not, old man, fall to thy prayers,
How ill white hairs become a fool and jester!

That was the terrible incursion of fact, such words as these, coming from the lips of a man who had an uner-

ring perception, and an unfaltering grasp of the fact, were more than words,—they were a deed, which Falstaff the unsubduable, with all his wit, could not coruscate away “By my troth, he’ll yield the crow a pudding one of these days, the king has kill’d his heart” Jacques in his own way supposes that he can dispense with realities The world, not as it is, but as it mirrors itself in his own mind, which gives to each object a humorous distortion, this is what alone interests Jacques ‘Shakspeare would say to us, “This egoistic, contemplative, unreal manner of treating life is only a delicate kind of foglery Real knowledge of life can never be acquired by the curious seeker for experiences” But this Shakspeare says in his non-hortatory, undogmatic way

Upon the whole, *As You Like It* is the sweetest and happiest of all Shakspeare’s comedies No one suffers, no one lives an eager intense life, there is no tragic interest in it as there is in *The Merchant of Venice*, as there is in *Much Ado About Nothing* It is mirthful, but the mirth is sprightly, graceful, exquisite, there is none of the rollicking fun of a Sir Toby here; the songs are not “coziers’ catches” shouted in the night time, “without any mitigation or remorse of voice,” but the solos and duets of pages in the wild-wood, or the noisier chorus of foresters The wit of Touchstone is not mere clownage, nor has it any indirect serious significances; it is a dainty kind of absurdity worthy to hold comparison with the melancholy of Jacques, And Orlando in the beauty and strength of early manhood, and Rosalind,

A gallant curtle-axe upon her thigh,
A boar-spear in her hand,

and the bright, tender, loyal womanhood within—are figures which quicken and restore our spirits, as music does, which is neither noisy nor superficial, and yet which knows little of the deep passion and sorrow of the world.

Shakspeare, when he wrote this idyllic play, was himself in his Forest of Arden. He had ended one great ambition—the historical plays—and not yet commenced his tragedies. It was a resting-place. He sends his imagination into the woods to find repose. Instead of the courts and camps of England, and the embattled plains of France, here was this woodland scene, where the palm-tree, the lioness, and the serpent are to be found, possessed of a flora and fauna that flourish in spite of physical geographers. [There is an open-air feeling throughout the play. The dialogue, as has been observed, catches freedom and freshness from the atmosphere. “Never is the scene within-doors, except when something discordant is introduced to heighten as it were the harmony”*] After the trumpet-tones of Henry V comes the sweet pastoral strain, so bright, so tender. Must it not be all in keeping? Shakspeare was not trying to control his melancholy. When he needed to do that, Shakspeare confronted his melancholy very passionately, and looked it full in the face. Here he needed refreshment, a sunlight tempered by forest-boughs, a breeze upon his forehead, a stream murmuring in his ears.†

* C. A. Brown. *Shakspeare's Autobiographical Poems*, p. 263.

† Hebler writes of *As You Like It*,—“Es ist eine Waldcur für Hofleute, die zum Glück mit heutigen Bad- oder Luftcuren das gemein hat, dass viele Gesunde dabei sind. So vor Allen Orlando und Rosalinde, für welche beide die Cur keine andere Bedeutung hat, als ihre Liebe.

Of the group of comedies which belong to this period the two latest in date are probably *Measure for Measure* and *All's Well that Ends Well*. When the former of these plays was written Shakspeare was evidently bidding farewell to mirth, its significance is grave and earnest, the humorous scenes would be altogether repulsive were it not that they are needed to present without disguise or extenuation the world of moral licence and corruption out of and above which rise the virginal strength and severity and beauty of *Isabella*. At the entrance to the dark and dangerous tragic world into which Shakspeare was now about to pass stand the figures of *Isabella* and of *Helena*,—one the embodiment of conscience, the other the embodiment of will. *Isabella* is the only one of Shakspeare's women whose heart and eyes are fixed upon an impersonal ideal, to whom something abstract is more, in the ardour and energy of her youth, than any human personality. Out of this Vienna in which

Corruption boils and bubbles
Till it o'errun the stew,

emerges this pure zeal, this rectitude of will, this virgin sanctity. *Isabella's* saintliness is not of the passive, timorous, or merely meditative kind. It is an active pursuit of holiness through exercise and discipline. She

auf die lieblichste Weise zur Erscheinung und Reife zu bringen, während das vorübergehend Bedenkliche ihrer Lage den Aples, selbst die Liebe noch, verschonenden Gotterfunken des Humors hervorlockt. Daneben der Contrast der blossen heben Natur in dem Schäferpärchen, und die heitere Parodie des idyllischen Hoflebens in der Heirath des Jägers mit einem Landmädchen, während der Blaise (Jacques) auch die schärfste Natur seine eigene Farbe ankränkt."—Aufsätze über Shakespeare, p 195

knows nothing of a Manichean hatred of the body, the life runs strongly and gladly in her veins, simply her soul is set upon things belonging to the soul, and uses the body for its own purposes. And that the life of the soul may be invigorated she would bring every unruly thought into captivity, "having in a readiness to revenge all disobedience"

Isab And have you nuns no farther privileges?
Th'an Are these not large enough?
Isab Yes, truly I speak not as desiring more,
But rather wishing a more strict restraint
Upon the sisterhood

This severity of Isabella proceeds from no real turning away on her part from the joys and hopes of womanhood, her brother, her schoolfellow Julia, the memory of her father, are precious to her, her severity is only a portion of the vital energy of her heart, living actively she must live purely, and to her the cloister is looked upon as the place where her energy can spend itself in stern efforts towards ideal objects. Bodily suffering is bodily suffering to Isabella, whose "cheek-roses" proclaim her physical health and vigour, but bodily suffering is swallowed up in the joy of quickened spiritual existence —

Were I under the terms of death
The impression of keen whips I'd wear as rubies,
And strip myself to death, as to a bed
That longung have been sick for ere I'd yield
My body up to shame

And as she had strength to accept pain and death for herself rather than dishonour, so she can resolutely accept pain and death for those who are dearest to her

When Claudio falters back dismayed from the immediate prospect of the grave, Isabella utters her piteous "Alas, alas!" to perceive the tenderness and timorousness of his spirit, but when he faintly invites her to yield herself to shame for his sake, she severs herself with indignation, not from her brother, not from Claudio, but from this disgrace of manhood in her brother's form—this treason against fidelity of the heart.

O, you beast!

O, faithless coward! O, dishonest wretch!

Wilt thou be made a man out of my vice?

Take my defiance!

Die, perish!

Isabella does not return to the sisterhood of Saint Clare. Putting aside from her the dress of religion, and the strict conventual rule, she accepts her place as Duchess of Vienna. In this there is no dropping away, through love of pleasure or through supineness, from her ideal, it is entirely meet and right. She has learned that in the world may be found a discipline more strict, more awful than the discipline of the convent, she has learned that the world has need of her, her life is still a consecrated life, the vital energy of her heart can exert and augment itself through glad and faithful widowhood, and through noble station more fully than in seclusion. To preside over this polluted and feculent Vienna is the office and charge of Isabella "a thing ensky'd and sainted."

Spirits are not finely touched
But to fine issues, nor Nature never lends
The smallest scruple of her excellence,

But, like a thrifty goddess, she determines
Herself the glory of a creditor,—
Both thanks and use *

In *All's Well that ends Well*, a subject of extreme difficulty, when regarded on the ethical side, was treated by Shakspeare with a full consciousness of its difficulty † A woman who seeks her husband, and gains him against his will, who afterwards by a fraud—a fraud however pious—defeats his intention of estranging her, and becomes the mother of his child, such a personage it would seem a sufficiently difficult task to render at-

* *Measure for Measure*, Act 1, Scene 1

† Years wide apart have been assigned for the date of *All's Well that ends Well*. Mr Fleay believes that it was written at two different periods, and that the play contains early and later work, which he endeavours to separate. His date for the completed play is 1602. H von Friesen is also of opinion that this is one of Shakspeare's earliest plays, and was afterwards rehandled. See *Shakespeare Jahrbuch*, vol II, pp 48-54. So also Gervinus (H von Friesen observes resemblances of style to the Duke's speeches in *Measure for Measure*, and Prof Karl Elze points out various parallels to passages in *Hamlet*. *Shakespeare Jahrbuch*, VII, pp 235, 236.) Delius, whose opinion on such a matter must be regarded as weighty, pronounces the style and the verse throughout to be different in their characteristic peculiarities from those of Shakspeare's early plays. Professor Hertzberg assigns the date 1603, and he expressly denies that an early and later style are observable in the play. "Man muss eingestehen dass die metrischen wie stilistischen Eigenthümlichkeiten sich gleichmässig auf das ganze Gedicht erstrecken und es durchaus als aus einem Guss gearbeitet erscheinen lassen. Wenn also diese Characterzüge einer späteren Periode, aus einer zweiten 'Textesrecension' entsprungen sein sollten, so müsste man annehmen, dass der Dichter mit Absicht von Anfang bis zu Ende seinen klaren Ausdruck angedunkelt, den einfachen Satzbau verwickelt und die regelmässigen und glatten Verse anomal und holprig gemacht habe. Dies kann Niemand annehmen." Hertzberg rejects the opinion that *All's Well* is the play (in an earlier form) mentioned by Meres as "*Love's Labour's Won*." Hertzberg contends that *Love's Labour's Won* was the *Taming of the Shrew*. Kreyssig connects *All's Well*,—the subdual of husband by wife,—with the *Shrew*,—the subdual of wife by husband.

tractive or admirable Yet Helena has been named by Coleridge "the loveliest of Shakspeare's characters" Possibly Coleridge recognised in Helena the single quality which, if brought to bear upon himself by one to whom he yielded love and worship, would have given definiteness and energy to his somewhat vague and incoherent life For sake of this one thing Shakspeare was interested in the story, and so admirable did it seem to him, that he could not choose but endeavour to make beautiful and noble the entire character and action of Helena. This one thing is the energy, the leap-up, the direct advance of the *will* of Helena, her prompt, unerroneous tendency towards the right and efficient *deed* She does not display herself through her words, she does not, except on rarest occasions, allow her feelings to expand and deploy themselves, her entire force of character is concentrated in what she does And therefore we see her quite as much indirectly, through the effect which she has produced upon other persons of the drama, as through self-confession or immediate presentation of her character

A motto for the play may be found in the words uttered with pious astonishment by the clown, when his mistress bids him to begone, "That man should be at woman's command and yet no hurt done." Helena is the providence of the play, and there is "no hurt done," but rather healing—healing of the body of the French King, healing of the spirit of the man she loves. For

* "Nicht nur am Könige, sondern auch an Bertram vollbringt sie eine glückliche Heilung" Professor Karl Elze Shakespeare Jahrbuch, vol VII., p 222

Bertram, when the story begins, though endowed with beauty and bravery and the advantages (and disadvantages), of rank, is in character, in heart, in will, a crude, ungracious boy. Helena loves him, and sets him, in her love, above herself, the poor physician's daughter, out of her sphere.

"Twere all one
That I should love a bright, particular star
And think to yed it, he is so above me

She loves him thus, but (if love can be conceived as distinct from liking) she does not wholly like him. She admits to herself that in worship of Bertram there is a certain fatuousness,—

Now he's gone, and my idolatrous fancy
Must sanctify his reliques.

She sees from the first that the friend of his choice, the French captain, is "a notorious liar," "solely a coward," "a great way fool", she trembles for what Bertram may learn at the court.

God send him well !
The court's a learning place , and he is one—
Parol What one i' faith ?
Hel. That I wish well.

Yet she sees in Bertram a potential nobleness, waiting to be evoked. And her will leaps forward to help him. Now she loves him,—loves him with devotion which comes from a consciousness that she can confer much, and she will form him so that one day she shall like him also.

Hel 'Tis pity
Parol What's pity?
Hel That wishing well had not a body in't,

Which might be felt, that we, the poorer born,
 Whose baser stars do shut us up in wishes,
 Might with effects of them follow our friends,
 And shew what we alone must think

But the "wishing well" of such a woman as Helena has indeed a sensible and apprehensible 'body in it. With a sacred boldness she assumes a command over Bertram's fate and her own. 'She cannot believe in the piety of resignation, or passiveness, in the religious duty of letting things drift, rather, she finds in the love which prompts her a true mandate from above, and a veritable providential power —

Our remedies oft in ourselves do lie
 Which we ascribe to heaven the fated sky
 Gives us free scope, only doth backward pull
 Our slow designs when we ourselves are dull
 What power is it that mounts my love so high?

Helena goes forth, encouraged by her mistress, the mother of the man she seeks to win, goes forth to gain her husband, to allay her own need of service to him, to impose herself on Bertram as the blessing that he requires. All this Helena does openly, with perfect courage. She does not conceal her love from the Countess, she does not for a moment dream of stealing after Bertram in man's attire. It is the most impulsively or the most delicately, and exquisitely feminine of Shakspeare's women whom he delights to disguise in the "garnish of a boy,"—Julia with her hair knit up "in twenty odd-conceited true love knots," Rosalind, the gallant curtle-axe upon her thigh, Viola, the sweet-voiced in whom "all is semblative a woman's part," Jessica, for whose transformation Cupid himself would blush, Portia,

the wise young judge, so poignantly feminine in her gifts of intellect and heart, Imogen, who steps into the cavern's mouth with the advanced sword in a slender and trembling hand. In Helena there is so much solidity and strength of character that we feel she would be enfeebled by any male disguise which might complicate the impression produced by her plain womanhood. There could be no charm in presenting as a pretender to male courage one who was actually courageous as a man.

But throughout, while Helena is abundantly courageous, Shakspeare intends that she shall at no moment appear unwomanly. In offering herself to Bertram, she first discloses her real feeling by words addressed to one of the young lords, from among whom it is granted her to choose a husband —

Be not afraid that I your hand should take,
I'll never do you wrong for your own sake

Only with Bertram she would venture on the bold experiment of wronging him for his own sake. The experiment, indeed, does not at first seem to succeed. Helena is wedded to Bertram, she has laid her will without reserve in her husband's hands, she had desired to surrender all to him, for his good, and she has surrendered all. But Bertram does not find this providential superintendence of his affairs of the heart, altogether to his taste, and in company with Parolles he flies from his wife's presence to the Italian war. Upon reading the concise and cruel letter in which Bertram has declared the finality of his separation from ..

her, Helena does not faint, nor does she break forth into bitter lamentation "This is a dreadful sentence," "'Tis bitter,"—thus, pruning her words, Helena controls "the thoughts which swell and throng" over her, until they condense themselves into one strong purpose. She will leave her mother, leave her home, and when she is gone and forgotten, Bertram will return from hardship and danger. But she would fain see him, and if anything can still be done, she will do that thing.

The mode by which Helena succeeds in accomplishing the conditions upon which Bertram has promised to acknowledge her as his wife, seems indeed hardly to possess any moral force, any validity for the heart or the conscience. It can only be said in explanation, that to Helena an infinite virtue and significance resides in a *deed*, out of a word or out of a feeling she does not hope for measureless good to come, but out of a deed what may not come? That Bertram should actually have received her as his wife, actually, though unwittingly, that he should indeed be father of the child she bears him, these are facts, accomplished things, which must work out some real advantage. And now Bertram has learnt his need of self-distrust, perhaps has learnt true modesty. His friend (who was all vain words apart from deeds), has been unmasked, and pitilessly exposed. May not Bertram now be capable of estimating the worth of things and of persons more justly? Helena, in taking the place of Diana, in beguiling her husband into at least material virtue, is still "doing him wrong, for his own sake." The man is "at woman's command," and there is "no hurt done."

Even at the last Bertram's attainment is but small; he is still no more than a potential piece of worthy manhood. We cannot suppose that Shakspeare has represented him thus without a purpose. Does not the poet wish us to feel that although much remains to be wrought in Bertram, his welfare is now assured? The courageous title of the play "*All's Well that ends Well*," is like an utterance of the heart of Helena, who has strength and endurance to attain the end, and who will measure things, not by the pains and trials of the way, not by the dubious and difficult means, but by that end, by the accomplished issue. *We need not, therefore*, concern ourselves any longer about Bertram, he is safe in the hands of Helena, she will fashion him as he should be fashioned, Bertram is at length delivered from the snares and delusions which beset his years of haughty ignorance and dulness of the heart, he is doubly won by Helena, therefore he cannot wander far, therefore he cannot finally be lost.*

The changes of type which took place in the prominent female characters of Shakspeare's plays as the poet passed from youth to manhood, and from early manhood to riper maturity, would form an interesting subject for detailed study. The emotional women of the early plays, if not turbulent and aggressive, are still deficient in delicacy of heart, in refinement of instinct, impulse, and

* On this play consult Professor Karl Elze's article in *Shakespeare Jahrbuch*, vol. vii, and preface by Hertzberg in the German Shakspeare Society's edition of Schlegel's and Tieck's Translation of Shakspeare, vol. xi. Hertzberg maintains that love of Lafen's daughter is a motive of Bertram's rejection of Helena. But see Elze's reply in the above mentioned article, p. 226.

habit. The intellectual women, who stand by the side of these, are bright and clever, but over-confident, forward, or defiant. In the early historical plays appear terrible female forms,—women whose ambitions have been foiled, whose hearts have been torn and crushed, who are filled with fierce sorrow, passionate indignation, a thirst for revenge. Such are the Duchess of Gloster, Margaret of Anjou, Queen Elinor, Constance. As comedy succeeds comedy, the female characters become more complex, more subtle, more exquisite. Rosaline's flouting of Berowne, becomes Rosalind's arch mockery of Orlando, or the sportive contests of Beatrice with Benedict. In Portia of "The Merchant of Venice" intellect and emotions play into one another with exquisite swiftness, brightness, and vital warmth.

Just at the close of the period which gave birth to Shakspeare's most joyous comedies, and at the entrance to the tragic period, appear types of female character which are distinguished by some single element of peculiar strength, Helena, Isabella, Portia of Julius Cæsar (type of perfect womanly heroism, yet environed by the weakness of her sex), and over against these are studies of feminine incapacity or ignobleness—Ophelia, Gertrude, Cressida. It is as if Shakspeare at this time needed some one strong, outstanding excellence to grasp and steady himself by, and had lost his delight in the even harmony of character which suits us, and brings us joy when we make no single, urgent, and peculiar demand for help. Next follow the tragic figures—Desdemona, the invincible loyalty

of wifehood, Cordelia, the invincible filial loyalty, sacrificial lives, which are offered up, and which sanctify the earth, lives which fall in the strife with evil, and which falling achieve their victories of love. And as these make the world beautiful and sacred, even while they leave it strange and sorrowful, so over against them appear the destroyers of life—Lady Macbeth, and the monsters Goneril, Regan.

Finally, in Shakspeare's latest plays appear upon the one hand the figures of the great sufferers—calm, self-possessed, much enduring, free from self-partiality, unjust resentment, and the passion of revenge—Queen Katharine, Hermione, and on the other hand are exquisite girlish figures, children who have known no sorrow, over whom is shed a magical beauty, an ideal light, while above them Shakspeare is seen, as it were, bowing tenderly—Miranda, Perdita. How great a distance has been traversed! Instead of the terrible Margaret of Anjou we have here Queen Katharine. Shakspeare in his early period would have found cold, and without suitability for the purposes of art, Katharine's patience, reserve, and equilibrium of soul. Instead of Rosaline here is Perdita. A death-bed glorious with a vision of angels, and the exquisite dawn of a young girl's life, these are the two last themes on which the imagination of the poet cared to dwell affectionately and long.

Here for the present we may pause. We have glanced at the growth of Shakspeare's mind and art as far onward as the opening of the period of the great tragedies. Wh

Shakspeare gained of insight and of strength during that period a subsequent chapter will attempt to tell *

* I am unwilling to offer any criticism of the play of Troilus and Cressida until I see my way more clearly through certain difficulties respecting its date and its ethical significance Mr Fleay believes that three stories can be distinguished—(1) Troilus and Cressida, (2) Hector, (3) Ajax, Ulysses, and the Greek Camp, and that these stories were written at different periods (See Transactions of the New Shakspeare Society) Mr Furnivall says—"that there are two parts, an early and a late, I do not doubt" Hertzberg assigns the date 1603 See his valuable Preface in the German Shakespeare Society's edition of Tieck's and Schlegel's Translation of *Shakspeare*, vol. xi, and on the sources of the play his article in *Shakespeare Jahrbuch*, vol vi, also in vol iii the article by Karl Eitner Hertzberg believes that the play remained unprinted and unacted until 1609 Ulrici's article on Troilus and Cressida in *Shakespeare Jahrbuch*, vol ix, make it clear that the play belongs rather to comedy than tragedy This article may be consulted (as well as Hertzberg's preface) on the questions raised by the concluding lines of the difficult epilogue by Pandarus

So far was written in 1875, but since then I have come to understand in some degree, I believe, the significance of this difficult play See *ante*, preface to the third edition

CHAPTER III.

THE FIRST AND SECOND TRAGEDY, ROMEO AND JULIET, HAMLET

DURING the first ten years of Shakspeare's dramatic career he wrote quickly, producing (if we suppose that he commenced authorship in 1590 at the age of twenty-six), on an average, about two plays in each year. These eighteen or twenty plays written between 1590 and 1600, include some eight or nine comedies, and the whole of the great series of English historical dramas, which, when *Henry V* was written, Shakspeare probably looked upon as complete. To this field he did not return, except in one instance when it would seem that a portion of a play on the subject of *Henry VIII* was written, and while still incomplete was handed over on some special occasion to the dramatist Fletcher to expand from three acts into five. In the first decade of Shakspeare's authorship (if we set aside *Titus Andronicus* as the work of an unknown writer), a single tragedy appears,—*Romeo and Juliet*. This play is believed to have engaged Shakspeare's attention during a number of years. Dissatisfied probably with the first form which it assumed, Shakspeare worked upon the play again, rewriting and enlarging it*. But it is not unlikely that

* The opinion of Mr Richard Grant White deserves to be stated. It is "That the *Romeo and Juliet* which has come down to us (for

even then he considered his powers to be insufficiently matured for the great dealing as artist with human life and passion, which tragedy demands;) for, having written *Romeo and Juliet*, Shakspeare returned to the histories, in which, doubtless, he was aware that he was receiving the best possible culture for future tragedy; and he wrote the little group of comedies in which Shaksperian mirth obtains its highest and most complete expression. Then, after an interval of about five years, a second tragedy, *Hamlet*, was produced. Over *Hamlet*, as over *Romeo and Juliet*, it is supposed that Shakspeare laboured long and carefully. Like *Romeo and Juliet* the play exists in two forms, and there is reason to believe that in the earlier form in each instance we possess an imperfect report of Shakspeare's first treatment of his theme *

It may be thought paradoxical to infer from the absence of tragedy in the earlier years of Shakspeare's dramatic career, that he looked upon the writing

there may have been an antecedent play upon the same story, was first written [in 1591], by two or more playwrights, of whom Shakspeare was one, that subsequently [in 1596], Shakspeare re-wrote this old play, of which he was part author, making his principal changes in the passages which were contributed by his co labourers." Mr R. G. White believes the first quarto of *Romeo and Juliet* to be an imperfect and garbled copy, obtained by the aid of a reporter, of Shakspeare's new work, the defects of which were supplied partly by some verse mongers of the day, and partly from the old play in the composition of which Shakspeare was one of two or more co labourers.

* The editors of the Cambridge Shakspeare believe that there was an old play on the subject of *Hamlet*, "some portions of which are still preserved in the quarto of 1603." For various bits of evidence (some good, some bad), to prove that the text of this quarto was obtained orally, and not directly from a manuscript, see Tschischwitz's "Shakspeare-Forschungen I *Hamlet*," pp 10 14.

of tragedy as his chief vocation as author, yet the inference is not unconfirmed by facts in Shakspeare's subsequent career. Almost from the first it would appear that he had before him the design of *Romeo and Juliet*. When after five or six years it was actually accomplished, there still appeared in the play unmistakable marks of immature judgment. Shakspeare accordingly, who in his histories had abundance of work planned out for him, wisely abstained for some time further from writing tragedy. But as soon as *Hamlet* was completed, and it became a demonstrated fact to the poet that he had attained his full maturity, and was master of his craft, then he no longer hesitated or delayed, and year by year from 1602 to 1612 he added to the great roll of his tragedies, accomplishing in those years by sustained energy of heart and imagination as marvellous a feat of authorship as the world has seen.

When Shakspeare began to write for the stage, as was noticed in the preceding chapter, he was by no means misled by self-confidence. He began cautiously and tentatively, feeling his way. And there was one cause which might reasonably make him timid in the direction of tragedy. Shakspeare, at the age of twenty-six, was not afraid to compete with contemporary writers in comedy and history. He co-operated, it may be, in the writing of historical plays, "*The First Part of the Contention*," and, "*The True Tragedie of Richard Duke of Yorke*," at an early age, and afterwards by revision and addition made these plays still more his own *. But the

* The latest study of 2 and 3 *Henry VI* and the relation of these to *The Contention* and *True Tragedie* is the admirably careful essay by

department of tragedy was dominated by a writer of superb genius, Christopher Marlowe. Shakspeare, whose powers ripened slowly, may at the time when he wrote "The Comedy of Errors," and "Love's Labour's Lost," have well hesitated to dispute with Marlowe his special province. Imitators and disciples had crowded around the master. All the vices of his style had been exaggerated. Shakspeare saw one thing clearly, that if the time ever came when he would write tragedy, the tragedy must be of a kind altogether different from that created upon Marlowe's method,—the method of idealising passions on a gigantic scale. To add to the pieces of the school of Marlowe a rhapsody of blood commingled with nonsense was impossible for Shakspeare, who was never altogether wanting in a sane judgment, and a lively sense of the absurd.

Thus it came about that Shakspeare at nearly forty years of age was the author of but two or three tragedies. Of these, *Romeo and Juliet* may be looked upon as the work of the artist's adolescence, and *Hamlet* as the evidence that he had become adult, and in this supreme department master of his craft. To add to the interest of these plays as subjects of Shakspearian study, each, as was observed above, exists in two very different forms, and from these something may be learnt as to the poet's method of rehandling his own work. In the case of *Romeo and Juliet*, we possess the English original, a

Miss Jane Lee, "Transactions of the New Shakspeare Society 1875-76"
 o. The opinion arrived at by Miss Lee is that in 2 and 3 *Henry VI*
 "Shakspeare and Marlowe are revisers of work by Marlowe, Greene and
 and Peele.

poem by Arthur Brooke, upon which Shakspeare founded his drama, and which in many particulars he minutely followed. It is therefore possible in the case of this play, to investigate with peculiar advantage Shakspeare's method of treating his original.

The first two tragedies having been so carefully and deliberately thought out, having been looked upon by their author as of chief importance among his writings, we might anticipate that the second could hardly have been written without conscious reference to the first. In his early tentative plays Shakspeare made trial of various styles, he broke out now on this side, now on that, in directions which were wide apart, now he was engaged upon a history, now upon a comedy of incident, almost a farce, now a comedy of dialogue, and again a comedy of tender and graceful sentiment. He evidently had resolved that he would not repeat himself, that he would not allow his invention to come under control of any one of its own creatures. Too often a distinguished literary success is the prelude to literary failure. The artist in fainter colours, and with a more uncertain outline repeats his admired figures and situations. Shakspeare instinctively and by resolve put himself into relation with facts of the most diverse kinds, and preferred a comparatively slow attainment of a comprehension of life to a narrow intensity of individuality. The broad history of the nation interested him, but also, the passion of love and death in two young hearts, he could laugh brightly, and mock the affectations and fashionable follies of his day, but he must also stand before the tomb of the Capulets.

possessed by a sense of mystery, and that strenuous pain, in which something else than mere sorrow is predominant

Now when writing Hamlet, his second tragedy, Shakspeare, we must needs believe, determined that he would break away from the influence of his first tragedy, Romeo and Juliet. Romeo and Juliet is steeped in passion, Hamlet is steeped in meditation. Contrast the hero of the one play, the man of the South, with the chief figure of the other, the Teuton, the man of the North. Contrast Hamlet's friend and comforter, Horatio, possessed of grave strength, self-government, and balance of character, with Romeo's friend, Mercutio, all brilliance, intellect, wit, and effervescent animal spirits. Contrast the gay festival in Capulet's house with the brutal drinking of the Danish king and courtiers. Contrast the moonlit night in the garden, while the nightingale's song is panting forth from the pomegranate tree, with the silence, the nipping and eager air of the platform of Elsinore, the beetling height to seaward, and the form of terror which stalked before the sentinels. Contrast the perfect love of Juliet and her Romeo, with the piteous, foiled desire for love in Hamlet and Ophelia. Contrast the passionate seizure upon death, as her immediate and highest need, of the Italian wife, with the misadventure of the crazed Ophelia, so pitiful, so accidental, "so un-heroic, ending in "muddy death." Yet, with all their points of contrast, there is one central point of affinity between the plays. Like Mr Browning's Paracelsus and his Sordello, the poems are companion poems, while they are set over one against the other, they

are contrasted but complementary * Hamlet resembles Romeo in his inability to maintain the will in a fruitful relation with facts, and with the real world Neither is a ruler of events Luck is for ever against Romeo, the stars are inauspicious to him, and to such men the stars will always be inauspicious, as to a Henry V they will always prove auxiliary With Hamlet to resolve is to stand at gaze before an action, and to become incapable of achieving it The necessary coupling between the purpose and the deed has been fatally dissolved There is this central point in common between Hamlet and Romeo—the will in each is sapped, but in each it is sapped by a totally different disease of soul †

The external atmosphere of the tragedy of Romeo and Juliet, its Italian colour and warmth, have been so finely felt by M Philarète Chasles that his words deserve to be a portion of every criticism of that play —“ Who does not recall those lovely summer nights, in which the forces of nature seem eager for development, and constrained to remain in drowsy languor—a mingling of intense heat, superabundant energy, impetuous power, and silent freshness ?

“ The nightingale sings in the depths of the woods
The flower-cups are half-closed A pale lustre is shed

* See the writer's lecture on the poetry of Mr Tennyson and Mr Browning *Afternoon Lectures*, vol v p 178

† “ Romeo is Hamlet in love There is the same rich exuberance of passion and sentiment in the one, that there is of thought and sentiment in the other Both are absent and self involved, both live out of themselves in a world of imagination ”—Hazlitt *Characters of Shakespeare's Plays*, p 177 (ed 1818)

over the foliage of the forests, and upon the brow of the hills. The deep repose conceals, we are aware, a procreant force, the melancholy reserve of nature is the mask of a passionate emotion. Under the paleness and the coolness of the night you divine restrained ardours, and flowers which brood in silence, impatient to shine forth.

“Such is the peculiar atmosphere with which Shakspeare has enveloped one of his most wonderful creations—*Romeo and Juliet*.”

“Not only the substance, but the forms of the language come from the South. Italy was the inventor of the tale: she drew it from her national memorials, her old family-feuds, her annals filled with amorous and bloody intrigues. In its lyric accent, its blindness of passion, its blossoming and abundant vitality, in the brilliant imagery, in the bold composition, no one can fail to recognise Italy. *Romeo* utters himself like a sonnet of Petrarch, with the same refined choice, and the same antitheses, there is the same grace and the same pleasure in versifying passion in allegorical stanzas. *Juliet*, too, is wholly the woman of Italy, with small gift of forethought, and absolutely ingenuous in her abandon, she is at once vehement and pure.”*

The season is midsummer. It wants a fortnight and odd days of Lammas-tide (August 1st). Wilhelm Schlegel, and after him Hazlitt, have spoken as if the atmosphere of the play were that of a southern spring†. Such a criticism indicates a want of sensibility to the

* *Études sur W. Shakspeare*, Marie Stuart, et L'Arétin, pp. 141-42.

† So also Flathe. *Shakspeare*, &c. Part II., p. 188.

tone and colouring of the piece The mid-July heat broods over the five tragic days of the story The mad blood is stirring in men's veins during these hot summer days * There is a thunderous feeling in the moral element The summer was needed also that the nights and mornings might quickly meet The nights are those luminous nights from which the daylight seems never wholly to depart, nights through which the warmth of day still hangs over the trees and flowers

It is worth while to pause and note Shakspeare's method of treating external nature as the *milieu* or enveloping medium of human passion, while sometimes, in addition, between external nature and human passion Shakspeare reveals acute points of special contact We recall in King Lear the long and terrible day which begins at moonset before the dawn, when Kent is put in the stocks, and which ends with the storm upon the heath The agony is intensified by the stretch of time, strained with passion and events, until the time tingles and is intense, it culminates in the night of furious wind and spouting rain, of lightning and of thunder, when the roots of nature seem shaken in the same upheaval of things which makes a daughter cruel We remember how Duncan breathed a delicate air when he entered under the martlet-haunted portals of Macbeth, as though nature insinuated into Duncan's senses a treacherous presentiment of peace and security, and there followed upon this the night when the earth was fever-

* *Benvolio* — "For now these hot days is the mad blood stirring" See the extract from Dr Theodor Sträter in H. H. Furness's *Variorum* Edition of *Romeo and Juliet*, pp 461-62

ous and the air was filled with lamentings and strange screams of death. We remember that other night of tempest and prodigy which preceded the fall of Julius Cæsar, when Cassius, catching exhilaration and energy from the mutiny in the heaven, walked about the streets unbraced, "submitting him unto the perilous night" Then in contrast with these we think of the lyric love of Lorenzo and Jessica under the star-sown sky, every orb of which sings in its motion like an angel "still quiring to the young-eyed cherubims," we think of the Forest of Arden, with its tempered light and shade, its streams where the deer comes to drink, and green haunts in which adversity grows sweet, we think of the mountain country of Wales, and the salutations to the heaven of the royal youths whom Cymbeline had lost. The air which surrounds the island of Prospero is one of enchantment fit to breathe upon marvel and beauty —

The isle is full of noises
Sounds and sweet airs that give delight and hurt not.

In the play of *Pericles* we are for ever in presence of the waters furious or serene, and their voices of tumult or of calm are for ever mingling with the human voices with the sorrow of the bereaved father, and the magical singing of the sea-pure and sea-sensitive Marina. Once again, in *Timon*, we are in presence of the sea,—but it is not the stormy waters of *Pericles* that we gaze at, it is not the yellow sands of Prospero's island, where the sea-nymphs dance, and curtsy, and take hands, in *Timon* it is neither the strength nor the beauty of the waves we are made to feel —

Timon hath made his everlasting mansion
Upon the beachèd verge of the salt flood ,
Who once a day with his embossed froth
The turbulent surge shall cover

We see the cold white lip of the wave curling over, and curling over again, with bitter monotony upon the sand, and it is there, touched by the salt and pitiless edge of the sea, that the corpse of the desperate man must lie abandoned

Romeo is not the determiner of events in the play. He does not stand prominently forward, a single figure in the first scene, as does Marlowe's Barabas, and Shakespeare's Richard III, soliloquising about his own persons and his plans. The first scene of the play prepares a place for Romeo, it presents the moral environment of the hero, it exhibits the feud of the houses which determines the lovers' fate, although they for a brief space forget these grim realities in the rapture of their joy. The strife of the houses Capulet and Montague appears in this first scene in its trivial, ludicrous aspect, threatening, however, in a moment to become earnest and formidable. The serving men Gregory and Samson biting thumbs at the serving-men Abraham and Balthasar,—this is the obverse of the tragic show. Turn to the other side, and what do we see? The dead bodies of young and beautiful human creatures, of Tybalt and Paris, of Juliet and Romeo, the bloody harvest of the strife. This first scene, half ludicrous, but wholly grave, was written not without a reference to the final scene. The bandying of vulgar wit between the servants must not hide from us a certain grim irony which underlies

the opening of the play Here the two old rivals meet, they will meet again And the prince appears in the last scene as in the first Then old Capulet and Montague will be pacified, then they will consent to let their desolated lives decline to the grave in quietness Meanwhile serving-men with a sense of personal dignity must bite their thumbs, and other incidents may happen

Few critics of the play have omitted to call attention to the fact that Shakspeare represents Romeo as already in love before he gives his heart to Juliet, in love with the pale-cheeked, dark-eyed, disdainful Rosaline "If we are right," Coleridge wrote, "in pronouncing this one of Shakspeare's early dramas, it affords a strong instance of the fineness of his insight into the nature of the passions, that Romeo is introduced already love-bewildered" The circumstance is not of Shakspeare's invention He has retained it from Brooke's poem, but that he thought fit to retain the circumstance, fearlessly declaring that Romeo's supreme love is not his first love, is noteworthy The contrast in the mind of the earlier poet between Rosaline, who,

From her youth was fostered evermore

With vertues foode, and taught in schole, of wisdomes skilfull lore,

and Juliet, who yields to her passion, and by it is destroyed, was a contrast which Shakspeare rejected as a piece of formal and barren morality Of what character is the love of Romeo for Rosaline? Romeo's is not an active practical nature like Henry V, neither is he great by intellect, a thinker in any high sense of the word But if he lives and moves and has his being

neither heroically in the objective world of action, like Henry V, nor in the world of the mind like Hamlet, all the more he lives, moves, and has his being in the world of mere emotion. To him emotion which enriches and exalts itself with the imagination, emotion apart from thought, and apart from action, is an end in itself. Therefore it delights him to hover over his own sentiment, to brood upon it, to feed upon it richly. Romeo must needs steep his whole nature in feeling, and, if Juliet does not appear, he must love Rosaline.

Nevertheless the love of Rosaline cannot be to Romeo as is the love of Juliet. It is a law in moral dynamics, too little recognised, that the breadth, and height, and permanence of a feeling depend in a certain degree at least upon the actual force of its external cause. No ardour of self-protection, no abandonment preposse, no self-sustained energy, can create and shape a passion of equal volume, and possessing a like certainty and directness of advance with a passion shaped, determined, and for ever re-invigorated by positive, objective fact. Shakspeare had become assured that the facts of the world are worthy to command our highest ardour, our most resolute action, our most solemn awe, and that the more we penetrate into fact the more will our nature be quickened, enriched, and exalted. The play of Romeo and Juliet exhibits to us the deliverance of a man from dream into reality. In Romeo's love of Rosaline we find represented the dream-life as yet undisturbed, the abandonment to emotion for emotion's sake. Romeo nurses his love, he sheds tears, he culti-

vates solitude, he utters his groans in the hearing of the comfortable friar, he stimulates his fancy with the sought-out phrases, the curious antitheses of the amorous dialect of the period *

Why, then, O bawling love ! O loving hate !
 O anything, of nothing first create !
 O heavy lightness ! Serious vanity !
 Mis-shapen chaos of well-seeming forms !
 Feather of lead, bright smoke, cold fire, sick health !

He broods upon the luxury of his sorrow And then Romeo meets Juliet Juliet is an actual force beyond and above himself, a veritable fact of the world Nevertheless there remains a certain clinging self-consciousness, an absence of perfect simplicity and directness even in Romeo's very real love of Juliet This is placed by Shakspeare in designed contrast with the singleness of Juliet's nature, her direct unerroneous passion which goes straight to its object, and never broods upon itself. It is Romeo who says in the garden scene,—

How silver-sweet sound lovers' tongues by night,
 Like softest music to attending ears.

He has overheard the voice of Juliet, and he cannot answer her call until he has drained the sweetness of the sound He is one of those men to whom the emotional atmosphere which is given out by the real object, and which surrounds it like a luminous mist, is more important than the reality itself. As he turns slowly away, loath to leave, Romeo exclaims,—

Love goes toward love, as school-boys from their books,
 But love from love, towards school with heavy looks

* Mrs Jamieson has noticed that in "All's Well that Ends Well" Helena mockingly reproduces this style of amorous antitheses (Act 1 Sc 1, ll 180 189) Helena, who lives so effectively in the world of fact, is contemptuous towards all unreality and affectation

But Juliet's first thought is of the danger to which Romeo is exposed in her father's grounds. It is Juliet who will not allow the utterance of any oath because the whole reality of that night's event, terrible in its joy, has flashed upon her, and she, who lives in no golden haze of luxurious feeling, is aroused and alarmed by the sudden shock of too much happiness. It is Juliet who uses direct and simple words—

Farewell compliment !
Dost thou love me ? I know thou wilt say " Ay,"
And I will take thy word

She has declared that her bounty is measureless, that her love is infinite, when a sudden prosaic interruption occurs, the nurse calls within, Juliet leaves the window, and Romeo is left alone. Is this new joy a dream ?

O blessed, blessed night ! I am afeard, {
Being in night, all this is but a dream,
Too flattering-sweet to be substantial

But Juliet hastily reappears with words upon her lips which make it evident that it is no dream of joy in which she lives

Three words, dear Romeo, and good night indeed
If that thy bent of love be honourable,
Thy purpose marriage, send me word to-morrow,
By one that I'll procure to come to thee,
Where, and what time thou wilt perform the rite,
And all my fortunes at thy foot I'll lay,
And follow thee, my lord, throughout the world

The wholeness and crystalline purity of Juliet's passion is flawed by no double self. She is all and entire in each act of her soul. While Romeo, on the contrary, is as yet but half delivered from self-consciousness

If Shakspeare ventured upon any generalization about women, it was perhaps this—that the natures of women are usually made up of fewer elements than those of men, but that those elements are ordinarily in juster poise, more fully organized, more coherent and compact, and that, consequently, prompt and efficient action is more a woman's gift than a man's. "Man delights not me, nor woman neither," confessed Hamlet, and the courtiers declare they smiled to think if he delighted not in man, what lenten entertainment *the players* would receive from him. *The players*—for the drama is founded on mere delight in human personality. Man delighted Shakspeare, and woman also, but the chief problems of life seemed to lurk for Shakspeare in the souls and in the lives of men, and therefore he was more profoundly interested in the natures of men than in those of women. His great tragedies are not Cordelia, Desdemona, Ophelia, Volumnia, but Lear, Othello, Hamlet, Coriolanus. Shakspeare's men have a history, moral growth or moral decay, his women act and are acted upon, but seldom grow and are transformed. We get from Shakspeare no histories of a woman's soul like the history of Romola, or of Maggie Tulliver, or of Dorothea Brooke, none—unless, perhaps, that of Cleopatra—at all so carefully studied and curiously detailed as may be found in the novels of Goethe. Shakspeare creates his women by a single strong or exquisite inspiration, but he studies his men. His witty women are not a complex of all various qualities like Falstaff; his wicked women are simply wicked like Goneril and Regan, not an inscrutable mystery of iniquity like Iago,

his women of intellect are bright, are effective with ideas which they use as the means of action or of enjoyment, but among them there is not a female Hamlet *

Yet the women of Shakspeare have almost always the advantage of his men. Although their natures are made up of fewer elements, yet because those elements are quite vital and coherent, his women are in the highest degree direct in feeling and efficient in action. All the half-organised power of men is not a match for their directness and efficiency. Portia in the Merchant of Venice can bring all her wits at a moment's notice into play, every faculty is instinct with a single and indivisible energy, set over against the great masculine force of Shylock she proves more than a match for him. In Helena (*All's Well that Ends Well*) there is perfect rectitude of intellect and will, and a solid unity of character which enables her to shape events as she has decided it is well they should be shaped, and secures her from all distraction and all illusion. She imposes herself as a blessing upon the high-born youth, who, for his part, had been sufficiently blind and dull, at length he

* See on this subject Mrs Jameson's *Characteristics of Women*, Introduction, also a remarkable passage in Mr Ruskin's *Sesame and Lilies*, pp 126 31. Rümelin maintains that in consequence of his position as player, Shakspeare was excluded from the acquaintance of women of fine culture and character, and therefore drew upon his fancy for his female portraits. At the same time Shakspeare shared with Goethe, Petrarch, Raphael, Dante, Rousseau, Jean Paul (a strange assemblage!) a mystical veneration for the feminine element of humanity as the higher and more divine. For a comparison of Shakspeare with Goethe in this respect, see Rümelin *Shakespeare Studien*, pp 288 292. It is clever and superficial, like much of the "realistic criticism" of Rümelin. Leo's "*Shakespeare's Frauen-Ideale*" is a somewhat misleading title. In the few pages on Shakspeare's women (pp 35 44), there is contained little that is new or valuable.

perceives that while he stumbled and seemed to go astray, Helena was the providence which forced him to stumble into security, and strength, and the abiding-place of love. Volumnia, by the unfaltering insistence of her single moral motive subdues Coriolanus. Macbeth is brave and cowardly, sceptical and superstitious, loyal and treacherous, ambitious and capable of service, at once restrained and stimulated by his imagination. Lady Macbeth is terribly efficient, at one time a will strung tense, at another a conscience strung tense, possessed of only that active kind of imagination which masters practical difficulties. She has violently wrenched her nature, and the wrench is fatal. But Macbeth can live on, sinking farther and farther from reality and strength and joy, dropping away into the shadow, undergoing gradual extinction, decay, and disintegration of his moral being, never a sudden and absolute ruin.

Juliet at once takes the lead. It is she who proposes and urges on the sudden marriage. She is impatient for complete self-surrender, eager that the deed should become perfect and irreversible. When, after the death of Tybalt, Romeo learns from the lips of the Friar that he has been condemned to banishment he is utterly unmanned. He abandons himself to helpless and hopeless despair. He turns the tender emotion upon himself, and extracts all the misery which is contained in that one word "banished." He throws himself upon the ground and grovels pitifully in the abjectness of his dismay. His will is unable to deal with his own emotions so as to subdue or control them. Upon the next day, after her casting away of her own

kindred, after her parting with her husband, Juliet comes to the same cell of Friar Laurence, her face pale and traces of tears upon it which she cannot hide Paris, the lover whom her father and mother have designed for Juliet, is there She meets him with gay words, gallantly concealing the heart which is eager and trembling, and upheld from desperation only by a high-strung fortitude Then when the door is shut her heart relieves itself, and she urges the Friar, with passionate energy, to devise forthwith a remedy for the evil that has befallen

In her home Juliet is now without adviser or sustainer, a girl of fourteen years, she stands the centre of a circle of power which is tyrannous, and pledged to crush her resistance, old Capulet (the Capulets are a fiery self-willed race, unlike the milder Montagues) has vehemently urged upon her the marriage with Count Paris She turns her pale face upon her father, and addresses him appealingly *

Good father, I beseech you on my knees
Hear me with patience but to speak a word

She turns to her mother,—the proud Italian matron, still young, who had not married for love, whose hatred is cold and deadly, and whose relation with the child, who is dear to her, is pathetically imperfect †

* Shakspeare, as Mr Clark notices, contrives to bring before us the paleness of Juliet's face in this great crisis of her life, dramatically, by means of old Capulet's vituperative terms —

Out you green sickness carrion ! out you baggage !
You tallow face !

† Shakspeare reduces Juliet's age from the sixteen years of Brooke's poem to fourteen He loved the years of budding womanhood—

Is there no pity sitting in the clouds,
That sees into the bottom of my grief?
O sweet my mother, cast me not away!
Delay this marriage for a month, a week.

Last she looks for support to her Nurse, turning in that dreadful moment with the instinct of childhood to the woman on whose breast she had lain, and uttering words of desperate and simple earnestness —

O God! O nurse! how shall this be prevented?

Some comfort, nurse

The same unfaltering severity with which a surgeon operates is shown by Shakspeare in his fidelity here to the nurse's character. The gross and wanton heart while the sun of prosperity is full, blossoms into broad vulgarity, and the raillery of Mercutio deals with it sufficiently. Now in the hour of trial her grossness rises to the dignity of a crime. "The Count is a lovely gentleman, Romeo's a dishclout to him, the second match excels the first, or if it does not, Juliet's first is dead, or as good as dead, being away from her" "This moment," Mrs Jameson has finely said, 'reveals Juliet to herself. She does not break into upbraidings, it is no moment for anger, it is incredulous amazement,

Miranda is fifteen years of age, Marina fourteen. Lady Capulet says to Juliet

By my count

I was your mother much upon these years


That you are now a maid *Act 1, Scene 3*

Therefore she is perhaps under thirty years of age. But it is thirty years since old Capulet last went masking (*Act 1, Scene 5*). Observe Lady Capulet's manner of speech with her husband in *Act 1v, Scene 4*, and note her announcement (intended to gratify Juliet) that she will despatch a messenger to Mantua to poison Romeo *Act 111, Scene 5*

succeeded by the extremity of scorn and abhorrence, which takes possession of her mind. She assumes at once and asserts all her own superiority, and rises to majesty in the strength of her despair." Here Juliet enters into her solitude.

The Friar has given Juliet a phial containing a strange, untried mixture; and she is alone in her chamber. Juliet's soliloquy ends with one of those triumphant touches by which Shakspeare glorified that which he appropriated from his originals. In Brooke's poem, Juliet swallows the sleeping-potion hastily lest her courage should fail. "Shakspeare," Coleridge wrote, "provides for the finest decencies. It would have been too bold a thing for a girl of fifteen,—but she swallows the draught in a fit of fright." This deprives Juliet of all that is most characteristic in the act. In the night and the solitude, with a desperate deed to do, her imagination is intensely and morbidly excited. All the hideous secrets of the tomb appear before her. Suddenly in her disordered vision the figure of the murdered Tybalt rises, and is manifestly in pursuit of some one. Of whom? Not of Juliet, but of her lover who had slain him. A moment before

* "The nurse has a certain vulgarised air of rank and refinement, as if priding herself on the confidence of her superiors, she had caught and assimilated their manners to her own vulgar nature. In this mixture of refinement and vulgarity both elements are made the worse for being together. She abounds, however, in serviceable qualities." Hudson. *Shakspeare's Life, Art and Characters*, vol. II, pp. 214, 215. Mrs. Jameson observes justly that the sweetness and dignity of Juliet's character could hardly have been preserved inviolate if Shakspeare had placed her in connection with any common-place dramatic waiting woman.

Juliet had shrunk with horror from the thought of confronting Tybalt in the vault of the Capulets. But now Romeo is in danger. All fear deserts her. To stand by Romeo's side is her one necessity. With a confused sense that this draught will somehow place her close to the murderous Tybalt, and close to Romeo whom she would save, calling aloud to Tybalt to delay one moment,—“Stay, Tybalt, stay!”—she drains the phial, not “in a fit of fright,” but with the words “Romeo! I come, this do I drink to thee” 

The brooding nature of Romeo, which cherishes emotion, and lives in it, is made salient by contrast with Mercutio, who is all wit, and intellect, and vivacity, an uncontrollable play of gleaming and glancing life. Upon the morning after the betrothal with Juliet, a meeting happens between Romeo and Mercutio. Previously, while lover of Rosaline, Romeo had cultivated a lover-like melancholy. But now, partly because his blood runs gladly, partly because the union of soul with Juliet has made the whole world more real and substantial, and things have grown too solid and lasting to be disturbed by a laugh, Romeo can contend in jest with Mercutio himself, and stretch his wit of cheveril “from an inch narrow to an ell broad.” Mercutio and the nurse are Shakspeare's creations in this play. For the character of the former he had but a slight hint in the poem of Arthur Brooke. There we read of Mercutio as a courtier who was bold among the bashful maidens as a lion among lambs, and we are told that he had an “ice-cold hand.” Putting together these two suggestions, discovering a significance in them, and animating

them with the breath of his own life, Shakspeare created the brilliant figure which lights up the first half of *Romeo and Juliet*, and disappears when the colours become all too grave and sombre

Romeo has accepted the great bond of love Mercutio, with his ice-cold hand, the lion among maidens, chooses above all things a defiant liberty, a liberty of speech, gaily at war with the prophecies, an airy freedom of fancy, a careless and masterful courage in dealing with life, as though it were a matter of slight importance. He will not attach himself to either of the houses. He is invited by Capulet to the banquet, but he goes to the banquet in company with Romeo and the Montagues. He can do generous and disinterested things, but he will not submit to the trammels of being recognised as generous. He dies maintaining his freedom, and defying death with a jest. To be made worm's meat of so stupidly, by a villain that fights by the book of arithmetic, and through Romeo's awkwardness, is enough to make a man impatient. "A plague o' both your houses!"

[The death of Mercutio is like the removal of a shifting breadth of sunlight, which sparkles on the sea, now the clouds close in upon one another, and the stress of the gale begins.*

The moment that Romeo receives the false tidings of Juliet's death, is the moment of his assuming full manhood. Now, for the first time, he is completely delivered from the life of dream, completely adult, and able to act

* The German Professor sometimes does not quite keep pace with Shakspeare, and is heard stumbling heavily behind him. Gervinus thus describes Mercutio: "A man without culture, coarse and rude, ugly, a scornful ridiculer of all sensibility and love."

with an initiative in his own will, and with manly determination. Accordingly, he now speaks with masculine directness and energy —

Is it even so? Then I defy you, stars!

Yes, he is now master of events, the stars cannot alter his course,

Thou know'st my lodgings, get me ink and paper,
And hire post-horses, I will hence to-night.

Bal I do beseech you, sir, have patience
Your looks are pale and wild, and do import
Some misadventure

Rom. Tush! thou art deceiv'd
Leave me, and do the thing I bid thee do
Hast thou no letters to me from the Friar?

Bal No, my good lord.

Rom No matter, get thee gone,
And hire those horses, I'll be with thee straight.

"Nothing," as Maginn has observed, "can be more quiet than his final determination,

Well, Juliet, I will lie with thee to-night

It is plain Juliet There is nothing about
'Cupid's arrow,' or 'Dian's wit,' no honeyed word
escapes his lips, nor again does any accent of despair
His mind is so made up, the whole course of the short
remainder of his life so unalterably fixed that it is
perfectly useless to think more about it.* * These words
because they are the simplest are amongst the most me-
morable that Romeo utters. Is this indeed the same
Romeo who sighed, and wept, and spoke sonnet-wise,
and penned himself in his chamber, shutting the
daylight out for love of Rosaline? Now passion,

imagination, and will, are fused together, and Romeo who was weak has at length become strong

In two noteworthy particulars Shakspeare has varied from his original. He has compressed the action from some months into four or five days*. Thus precipitancy is added to 'the course of events and passions. Shakspeare has also made the catastrophe more calamitous than it is in Brooke's poem. It was his invention to bring Paris across Romeo in the church-yard. Paris comes to strew his flowers, uttering in a rhymed sextain, (such as might have fallen from Romeo's lips in the first Act) his pretty lamentation. Romeo goes resolutely forward to death. He is no longer "young Romeo," but adult, and Paris is the boy. He speaks with the gentleness, and with the authority of one who knows what life and death are of one who has

* The following passage quoted by H. H. Furness (*Variorum Romeo and Juliet*, pp 226,27), from Mr Clarke may be serviceable as giving some of the notes of time which occur in this play, "In *Scene 1*, the Prince desires Capulet to go with him at once, and Montague to come to him, 'this afternoon.' In *Scene 2*, Capulet speaks of Montague being 'bound' as well as himself, which indicates that the Prince's charge has just been given to both of them, and shortly after speaks of the festival at his house 'this night'. At this festival Romeo sees Juliet when she speaks of sending to him 'to morrow,' and on that 'morrow' the lovers are united by Friar Laurence. *Act iii* opens with the scene where Tybalt kills Mercutio, and during which scene Romeo's words, "Tybalt, that *an hour* hath been my kinsman" show that the then time is the afternoon of the same day. The Friar, at the close of *Scene 3* of that Act bids Romeo 'good night," and in the next scene, Paris, in reply to Capulet's inquiry, 'What day is this?' replies, '*Monday*, my lord'. This, by the way, denotes that the 'old accustomed feast' of the Capulets, according to a usual practice in Catholic countries, was celebrated on a Sunday evening. In *Scene 5* of *Act iii*. comes the parting of the lovers at the dawn of Tuesday, and when at the close of the scene, Juliet says she shall repair to Friar Laurence's cell. *Act iv* commences with her

gained the superior position of those who are about to die over those who still may live

Good, gentle youth, tempt not a desperate man
Fly hence and leave me, think upon these gone,
Let them affright thee I beseech thee, youth,
Put not another sin upon my head,
By urging me to fury

He would save Paris if that might be But Paris still crosses Romeo, and he must needs be dealt with

Wilt thou provoke me? then have at thee, boy

Romeo has now a definite object, he has a deed to do, and he will not brook obstacles *

Friar Laurence remains to furnish the Prince with an explanation of the events It is impossible to agree with those critics, among others Gervinus, who represent

appearance there, thus carrying on the action during the same day, Tuesday But the effect of long time is introduced by the mention of 'evening mass,' and by the Friar's detailed directions and reference to 'to-morrow's night,' so that when the mind has been prepared by the change of scene, by Capulet's anxious preparations for the wedding, and by Juliet's return to filial submission, there seems no violence done to the imagination by Lady Capulet's remarking, 'Tis now near night' . . . Juliet retires to her own room with the intention of selecting wedding attire for the next morning, which her father has said shall be that of the marriage, anticipating it by a whole day—Wednesday instead of Thursday" The sleeping-potion is expected by the Friar to operate during two and forty hours, *Act iv Scene 1* Juliet drinks it upon Tuesday night, or rather in the night hours of Wednesday morning—delaying as long as she dares On the night of Thursday she awakens in the tomb and dies Maginn believed that there must be some mistake in the reading "two and forty hours," but there is no need to suppose this The play, as Maginn observes, is dated by Shakspeare throughout with a most exact attention to hours

* In the first quarto Benvolio dies. Montague, *Act v Scene 3*, announces the death of his wife,—the quarto adds the line, "And young Benvolio is deceased too"

the Friar as a kind of chorus expressing Shakspeare's own ethical ideas, and his opinions respecting the characters and action. It is not Shakspeare's practice to expound the moralities of his artistic creations, nor does he ever by means of a chorus stand above and outside the men and women of his plays, who are bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh. The nearest approach perhaps to a chorus, is to be found in the person of Enobarbus in Antony and Cleopatra. Hamlet commissions Horatio to report him and his cause aright to the unsatisfied, and Horatio placing the bodies of the dead upon a stage, is about, in judicial manner, to declare the causes of things, but Shakspeare declines to put on record for us the explanations made by Horatio. No! Friar Laurence also is moving in the cloud, and misled by error as well as the rest. Shakspeare has never made the moderate, self-possessed, sedate person, a final or absolute judge of the impulsive and the passionate, the one sees a side of truth which is unseen by the other, but to neither is the whole truth visible. The Friar had supposed that by virtue of his prudence, his moderation, his sage counsels, his amiable sophistries, he could guide these two young, passionate lives, and do away the old tradition of enmity between the houses. There in the tomb of the Capulets is the return brought in by his investment of kindly scheming. Shakspeare did not believe that the highest wisdom of human life was acquirable by mild, monastic meditation, and by gathering of simples in the coolness of the dawn. Friar Laurence too, old man, had his lesson to learn.

In accordance with his view that the Friar represents,

the chorus in this tragedy, Gervinus discovers as the leading idea of the piece a lesson of moderation; the poet makes his confession that "excess in any enjoyment, however pure in itself, transforms its sweet into bitterness, that devotion to any single feeling, however noble, bespeaks its ascendancy, that this ascendancy moves the man and woman out of their natural spheres"*. It is somewhat hard upon Shakspeare to suppose that he secreted in each of his dramas a central idea for a German critic to discover. But if there be a central idea in *Romeo and Juliet* can this be it? What! did Shakspeare then mean that *Romeo and Juliet* loved too well? That all would have been better if they had surrendered their lives each to the other less rapturously, less absolutely? At what precise point ought a discreet regard for another human soul to check itself and say, "Thus far towards complete union will I advance, but here it is prudent to stop?" Or are not *Romeo's* words at least as true as the *Friar's*?

Come what sorrow can,
It cannot countervail the exchange of joy
That one short minute gives me in her sight
Do thou but close our hands with holy words,
Then love-devouring Death do what he dare,
It is enough I may but call her mine

Doubtless, also, Cordelia misunderstood the true nature of the filial relation, upon perceiving a possibility of defeat, she ought to have retreated to the safe coast of France. Portia upon hearing that the enemies of Brutus were making head, weakly "fell distract," and

swallowed fire, not having learned that a well-balanced heart bestows upon a husband only a regulated moderation of love, Shakspeare, by the example of Portia, would teach us that a penalty is paid for excess of wifely loyalty! No, this method of judging characters and actions by gross awards of pleasure and pain as measured by the senses does not interpret the ethics or the art of Shakspeare, or of any great poet. Shakspeare was aware that every strong emotion which exalts and quickens the inner life of man at the same time exposes the outer life of accident and circumstance to increased risk. But the theme of tragedy, as conceived by the poet, is not material prosperity or failure, it is spiritual, fulfilment or failure of a destiny higher than that which is related to the art of getting on in life. To die under certain conditions may be a higher rapture than to live.

Shakspeare did not intend that the feeling evoked by the last scene of this tragedy of *Romeo and Juliet* should be one of hopeless sorrow or despair in presence of failure, ruin, and miserable collapse * *Juliet and Romeo*, to whom

* Kreyssig writes with reference to this tragedy — "Nicht zufällig ist die ideale, leidenschaftliche Jugendliebe in Sage und Gedicht aller Völker die Schwester des Leides. Sie hat ihren Lohn in sich selbst. Das Leben hat ihr Nichts weiter zu bieten." — *Shakespeare Fragen*, p. 120. In the *Shakespeare Jahrbuch*, vol. ix. p. 328, will be found a notice of a study of *Romeo and Juliet* (Leipzig, 1874) by the celebrated author of the "*Philosophie des Unbewussten*," E. von Hartmann. He pronounces that the love between Juliet and Romeo is not the deep, spiritual, German ideal of love, but a sensuous play of passionate fancy (Did not this latest leader of German thought previously teach that love at its best and truest is an illusion imposed upon the individual by the Unconscious. Somewhat which displays itself through nature and man, an illusion which serves the important purpose of securing the continuance of the species?) To such criticism the true answer was given long since by Franz Horn, — "Shakspeare knows nothing, and chooses

Verona has been a harsh step-mother, have accomplished their lives. They loved perfectly. Romeo had attained to manhood. Juliet had suddenly blossomed into heroic womanhood. Through her, and through anguish and joy, her lover had emerged from the life of dream into the waking life of truth. Juliet had saved his soul, she had rescued him from abandonment to spurious feeling, from abandonment to morbid self-consciousness, and the enervating luxury of emotion for emotion's sake. What more was needed? And as secondary to all this, the enmity of the houses is appeased? Montague will raise in pure gold the statue of true and faithful Juliet, Capulet will place Romeo by her side. Their lives are accomplished, they go to take up their place in the large history of the world, which contains many such things. Shakspeare in this last scene carries forward our imagination from the horror of the tomb to the better life of man, when such love as that of Juliet and Romeo will be publicly honoured, and remembered by a memorial all gold.

to know nothing, of that false division of love into spiritual and sensual, or rather, he knows of it only when he purposely takes notice of it, that is, when he wishes to depict affectation striving after a misconceived platonism, or on the other hand, when he portrays a coarse, brutish, merely earthly passion" (Translated in Furness's *Romeo and Juliet*, p. 446.) Contrast Juliet with Cressida, or Goethe's *Mignon* with his *Philina*. See *Shakespeare Jahrbuch*, vol. viii. p. 16, and Mrs. Jameson's "*Characteristics of Woman*," especially the passage in which she comments upon Juliet's soliloquy, "*Gallop apace.*"

* Among the critics of this play, one of the most intelligently appreciative is George Fletcher in his *Studies of Shakespeare*, 1847. Fletcher's interpretation of Juliet's soliloquy before she drinks the sleeping-potion differs from that given above, and I will not assert that Fletcher may not be right, pp. 349-355. It may be worth while to add a note on the chief critical crux of the play, "*Runnawayes Eyes*," Act iii.

II

When Hamlet was written Shakspeare had passed through his years of apprenticeship, and become a master-dramatist. In point of style the play stands midway between his early and his latest works. The studious superintendence of the poet over the development of his thought and imaginings, very apparent in Shakspeare's early writings, now conceals itself, but the action of imagination and thought has not yet become embarrassing in its swiftness and multiplicity of direction. Rapid dialogue in verse, admirable for its combination of verisimilitude with artistic metrical effects occurs in the scene in which Hamlet questions his friends respecting the appearance of the ghost (Act 1 Scene 2), the soliloquies of Hamlet are excellent examples of the slow, dwelling verse which Shakspeare appropriates to the utterance of thought in solitude, and nowhere did

Scene 2. l. 6 The notes on this passage in Mr Furness's edition of the play fill nearly thirty closely printed pages. "Die Zeit ist unendlich lang," said Goethe. I add my stone to this cairn, under which the meaning lies buried. In *The Merchant of Venice, Act 11 Scene 6*, there is an echo of the sense and of the language of this passage which confirms the reading *Runnawayes*. Gratiano and Salarino have spoken of the eagerness of lovers out running time. This set Shakspeare thinking of the passage in *Romeo and Juliet*. Jessica, in her boy's disguise, says—

Love is blind, and lovers cannot see

The pretty follies that themselves commit

Lorenzo —But come at once,

For the close night doth play the runaway

Compare the first ten lines of Juliet's soliloquy, and observe the echo of sense and speech.

* The characteristics of Shakspeare's latest style are described by Mr Spedding in the following masterly piece of criticism. "The opening of [Henry VIII.] seemed to have the full stamp of Shakspeare

Shakspeare write a nobler piece of prose than the speech in which Hamlet describes to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern his melancholy. But such particulars as these do not constitute the chief evidence which proves that the poet had now attained maturity. The mystery, the baffling, vital obscurity of the play, and in particular of the character of its chief person, make it evident that Shakspeare had left far behind him that early stage of development when an artist obtrudes his intentions, or distrusting his own ability to keep sight of one uniform design, deliberately and with effort holds that design persistently before him. When Shakspeare completed Hamlet he must have trusted himself and trusted his audience, he trusts himself to enter into relation with his subject, highly complex as that subject was, in a pure, emotional manner. Hamlet might so easily have been manufactured into an enigma, or a puzzle, and then the puzzle, if sufficient pains were bestowed, could be completely taken to pieces and explained. But Shakspeare created it a mystery, and therefore it is for ever suggestive, for ever suggestive, and never wholly explicable.

in his latest manner, the same close packed expression, the same life, and reality, and freshness, the same rapid and abrupt turnings of thought, so quick that language can hardly follow fast enough, the same impatient activity of intellect and fancy, which having once disclosed an idea, cannot wait to work it orderly out, the same daring confidence in the resources of language, which plunges headlong into a sentence without knowing how it is to come forth, the same careless metre which disdains to produce its harmonious effects by the ordinary devices, yet is evidently subject to a master of harmony, the same entire freedom from book-language and commonplace"—On the several shares of Shakspeare and Fletcher in the play of Henry VIII, by James Spedding, reprinted in Transactions of the New Shakspeare Society from *The Gentleman's Magazine* for August 1850

It must not be supposed, then, that any *idea*, any magic phrase will solve the difficulties presented by the play, or suddenly illuminate everything in it which is obscure. The obscurity itself is a vital part of the work of art which deals not with a problem, but with a life, and in that life, the history of a soul which moved through shadowy borderlands between the night and day, there is much (as in many a life that is real) to elude and baffle enquiry. It is a remarkable circumstance that while the length of the play in the second quarto considerably exceeds its length in the earlier form of 1603, and thus materials for the interpretation of Shakspeare's purpose in the play are offered in greater abundance, the obscurity does not diminish, but, on the contrary, deepens, and if some questions appear to be solved, other questions in greater number spring into existence.

We may at once set aside as misdirected a certain class of Hamlet interpretations, those which would transform this tragedy of an individual life into a dramatic study of some general social phenomenon, or of some period in the history of civilization. A writer, who has applied an admirable genius for criticism, comprehensive and penetrative, to the study of this play,* describes it as Shakspeare's artistic presentation of a phenomenon recurrent in the world with the regularity of a law of nature, the phenomenon of revolutions. Hamlet cannot escape from the world which surrounds him. In the wreck of a society, which is rotten to the core, he goes down, with the accession of Fortinbras a new and

* H. A. Werner Ueber das Dunkel in der Hamlet-Tragedie
Jahrbuch der Deutschen Shakspeare Gesellschaft, vol. v pp 37-81

sounder era opens We must not allow any theory, however ingenious, to divert our attention from fixing itself on this fact, that Hamlet is the central point of the play of Hamlet It is not the general cataclysm in which a decayed order of things is swept away to give place to new rough material, it is not the downfall of the Danish monarchy, and of a corrupt society, together with the accession of a new dynasty and of a hardier civilization that chiefly interested Shakspeare The vital heart of the tragedy of Hamlet cannot be an idea, neither can it be a fragment of political philosophy Out of Shakspeare's profound sympathy with an individual soul and a personal life, the wonderful creation came into being

It is true, however, as the critic referred to maintains, that the weakness of Hamlet is not to be wholly set down to his own account The world is against him There is no such thing as naked manhood Shakspeare, who felt so truly the significance of external nature as the envioning medium of human passion, understood also that no man is independent of the social and moral conditions under which he lives and acts Goethe in the celebrated criticism upon this play contained in his "Wilhelm Meister" has only offered a half interpretation of its difficulties, and subsequent criticism, under the influence of Goethe, has exhibited a tendency too exclusively subjective "To me," wrote Goethe, "it is clear that Shakspeare meant to represent the effects of a great action laid upon a soul unfit for the performance of it In this view the whole piece seems to be composed There is an oak

tree planted in a costly jar, which should have borne pleasant flowers in its bosom the roots expand, the jar is shivered "

This is one half of the truth , but only one half In several of the tragedies of Shakspeare the tragic disturbance of character and life is caused by the subjection of the chief person of the drama to some dominant passion, essentially antipathetic to his nature, though proceeding from some inherent weakness or imperfection,—a passion from which the victim cannot deliver himself, and which finally works out his destruction Thus Othello, whose nature is instinctively trustful and confiding, with a noble child-like trust, a man

Of a free and open nature

That thinks men honest that but seem to be so,

a man "not easily jealous," Othello is inoculated with the poison of jealousy and suspicion, and the poison maddens and destroys him Macbeth, made for subordination, is the victim of a terrible and unnatural ambition Lear, ignorant of true love, yet with a supreme need of loving and of being loved, is compelled to hatred, and drives from his presence the one being who could have satisfied the hunger of his heart Timon, who would fain indulge an universal, lax benevolence is transformed to a revolter from humanity, "I am Misanthropos and hate mankind" We may reasonably conjecture that the Hamlet of the old play,—a play at least as old as that group of bloody tragedies inspired by the earlier works of Marlowe,—was actually what Shakspeare's Hamlet, with a bitter pleasure in misrepresenting his own nature, describes himself as being, "very proud, revenge-

ful, ambitious" This revengeful Hamlet of the old play exhibited, we may suppose, a close kinship to the Hamlet of the French novelist, Belleforest, and of the English "Historie,"—the Hamlet who in the banquet-hall burns to death his uncle's courtiers, whom he had previously stupefied with strong drink. But Shakspeare, in accordance with his dramatic method, and his interest as artist in complex rather than simple phenomena of human passion and experience, when re-creating the character of the Danish Prince, fashions him as a man to whom persistent action, and in an especial degree the duty of deliberate revenge is peculiarly antipathetic. Under the pitiless burden imposed upon him Hamlet trembles, totters, falls. Thus far Goethe is right.

But the tragic *nodus* in Shakspeare's first tragedy—Romeo and Juliet—was not wholly of a subjective character. The two lovers are in harmony with one another, and with the purest and highest impulses of their own hearts. The discord comes from the outer world; they are a pair of "star-crossed lovers." Their love is enveloped in the hatred of the houses. Their life had grown upon a larger life, a tradition and inheritance of hostility and crime, against this they rebelled, and the larger life subdued them. The world fought against Romeo and Juliet, and they fell in the unequal strife. Now Goethe failed to observe, or did not observe sufficiently, that this is also the case with Hamlet.

The time is out of joint O cursed spite,
That ever I was born to set it right

Hamlet is called upon to assert moral order in a world of moral confusion and obscurity. He has not an

open plain or a hillside on which to fight his battle, but a place dangerous and misleading, with dim and winding ways. He is made for honesty, and he is compelled to use the weapons of his adversaries, compelled to practise a shifting and subtle stratagem; thus he comes to waste himself in ingenuity, and crafty device. All the strength which he possesses would have become organised and available had his world been one of honesty, of happiness, of human love. But a world of deceit, of espionage, of selfishness surrounds him, his idealism, at thirty years of age, almost takes the form of pessimism, his life and his heart become sterile; he loses the energy which sound and joyous feeling supplies, and in the wide-spreading waste of corruption which lies around him, he is tempted to understand and detest things, rather than accomplish some limited practical service. In the unweeded garden of the world, why should he task his life to uproot a single weed?

• If Goethe's study of the play, admirable as it was, misled criticism in one way by directing attention too exclusively upon the inner nature of Hamlet, the studies by Schlegel and by Coleridge tended to mislead criticism in another, by attaching an exaggerated importance to one element of Hamlet's character. "The whole," wrote Schlegel, "is intended to show that a calculating consideration, which exhausts all the relations and possible consequences of a deed, must cripple the power of acting." It is true that Hamlet's power of acting was crippled by his habit of "thinking too precisely on the event," and it is true, as Coleridge said, that in Hamlet we see "a great, an almost

enormous intellectual activity, and a proportionate aversion to real action consequent upon it" But Hamlet is not merely or chiefly intellectual, the emotional side of his character is quite as important as the intellectual, his malady is as deep-seated in his sensibilities and in his heart as it is in the brain. If all his feelings translate themselves into thoughts, it is no less true that all his thoughts are impregnated with feeling To represent Hamlet as a man of preponderating power of reflection, and to disregard his craving, sensitive heart is to make the whole play incoherent and unintelligible *

It is Hamlet's intellect, however, together with his deep and abiding sense of the moral qualities of things, which distinguishes him, upon the glance of a moment, from the hero of Shakspeare's first tragedy, Romeo If Romeo fail to retain a sense of fact and of the real world because the fact, as it were, melts away and disappears in a solvent of delicious emotion, Hamlet equally loses a sense of fact because with him each object and event transforms and expands itself into an idea When the play opens he has reached the age of thirty years,—the age, it has been said, when the ideality of youth ought to become one with and inform the practical tendencies of manhood,—and he has received culture of every kind except the culture of active life During the reign of the strong-willed elder Hamlet there was no call to action for his meditative

* See W. Oehlmann's article *Die Gemüthsseite des Hamlet-Characters* in *Jahrbuch der Deutschen Shakespeare Gesellschaft*, vol. III p. 208

son He has slipped on into years of full manhood still a haunter of the university, a student of philosophies, an amateur in art, a ponderer on the things of life and death, who has never formed a resolution or executed a deed

This long course of thinking, apart from action, has destroyed Hamlet's very capacity for belief, since in belief there exists a certain element contributed by the will Hamlet cannot adjust the infinite part of him to the finite, the one invades the other and infects it, or rather the finite disharms and dissolves, and leaves him only in presence of the idea. He cannot make real to himself the actual world, even while he supposes himself a materialist, he cannot steadily keep alive within himself a sense of the importance of any positive, limited thing,—a deed for example Things in their actual, phenomenal aspect flit before him as transitory, accidental and unreal. And the absolute truth of things is so hard to attain and only, if at all, is to be attained in the *mind* Accordingly Hamlet can lay hold of nothing with calm, resolved energy, he cannot even retain a thought in indefeasible possession Thus all through the play he wavers between materialism and spiritualism, between belief in immortality and disbelief, between reliance upon providence and a bowing under fate In presence of the ghost a sense of his

* In Shakspeare-Forschungen I. Hamlet, by Benno Tschischwitz (Halle, 1868), the author endeavours to prove that Shakspeare was acquainted with the philosophy of Bruno, and embodied portions of it in the play of Hamlet Giordano Bruno lived in London from the year 1583 to 1586, where he seems to have received the patronage of Sir P. Sidney, Lord Buckhurst, and the Earl of Leicester He became professor at Wittenberg

own spiritual existence, and the immortal life of the soul grows strong within him. In presence of spirit he is himself a spirit —

I do not set my life at a pin's fee,
And for my soul, what can it do to that,
Being a thing immortal as itself?

When left to his private thoughts he wavers uncertainly to and fro, death is a sleep, a sleep, it may be, troubled with dreams. In the graveyard, in the presence of human dust, the base affinities of our bodily nature prove irresistibly attractive to the curiosity of Hamlet's imagination, and he cannot choose but pursue the history of human dust through all its series of hideous metamorphoses. Thus, as Romeo's emotions, while he lived in abandonment to the life of feeling for feeling's sake, are not genuine emotions, so Hamlet's thoughts, while he is given over to the life of brooding meditation, are hardly even so much as real thoughts, but are rather phantom ideas which dissolve, reform, and dissolve again, changing forever with every wind of circumstance. He is incapable of certitude.

When Hamlet first stands before us, his father has been two months dead, his mother has been for a month the wife of Claudius. He is solitary in the midst of the court. A mass of sorrow, and of wounded feeling, of shame and of disgust has been thrown back upon him, and this secretion of feeling which obtains no vent is busy in producing a wide-spreading, morbid humour. The misery of self-suppression leaves him in a state of weak and intense irritability. Every word uttered pricks him, and he is longing to be alone. A little

bitterness escapes in his brief acrid answers to the king, and when his mother, in her insensibility to true feeling, chances upon the word "seems" his irritation breaks forth, and after his fashion (that of one who relieves himself by speech rather than by deeds) he unpacks his heart in words. The queen who is soft and sensual, a lover of ease, withal a little sentimental, and therefore incapable of genuine passion, does not resent the outbreak of her strange son, and Hamlet, somewhat ashamed of his demonstration, which has the look of a display of superior feeling, endures in silence his uncle's tedious moralizing on the duties of mourners. Then with grave courtesy he yields to his mother's request that he should renounce his intention of returning to Wittenberg,

I shall in all my best obey you, madam

What matters it whether he go or stay! Life is all so flat, stale, and unprofitable, that the difference between Wittenberg and Elsinore cannot be worth contending for*. But when at length he is alone, Hamlet feels himself enfranchised,—free to shed abroad his sorrow, to gaze intensely and mournfully upon his own audity of spirit, and to compensate in the idea for the expenditure of kindness in act made on his mother's behalf. A frail mother, an incestuous mother, a mother endowed with less discourse of reason than the beasts! He has satisfied the queen with an act,

* Observe the contrast between Hamlet and Lærtès. The latter wrings by laboursome petition leave from his father to return to Paris. Lærtès had come from Paris to the coronation, Horatio, from Wittenberg to the late king's funeral.

and action, this way or that, is profoundly insignificant to Hamlet. But in his mind she shall get no advantage of him. He will see her as she is, and if he is gracious to her in his deeds, he will, in his thoughts, be stern and inexorable.

In this scene we make acquaintance with two important persons in Hamlet's world. "Something is rotten in the state of Denmark," exclaimed Marcellus. Rather all is rotten—the whole head is sick and the whole heart faint. On the throne, the heart of the living organism of a state, reigns the appearance of a king, but under this kingly appearance is hidden a wretched, corrupt, and cowardly soul, a poisoner of the true king and of true kingship, incestuous, gross and wanton, a fierce drinker, a palterer with his conscience, and as Hamlet vehemently urging the fact describes him "a vice of kings," "a villain and a cut-purse," "a paddock, a bat, a gib." Such is kingship in Denmark.

And the queen, Hamlet's mother, one of the two women from whom Hamlet must infer what womanhood is, what is she? For thirty years she had given the appearance, the *simulacrum* of true love to her husband, one on whom

Every god did seem to set his seal }
To give the world assurance of a man,

one who even in the place of penance still retains his solicitude for her, and this show of thirty years' love had proved to be without reality or root in her being, it had been no more than a sinking down upon the accidental things of life, its comforts and pleasures, her husband had passed out of her existence like any other

casual object, during all those years of blameless wifehood she had never once conceived the possibility of a love which is founded upon the essential, not the accidental elements of life, she had never once known what is the bond of life to life, and of soul to soul. The timid, self-indulgent, sensuous, sentimental queen is as remote from true woman's virtue as Claudius is from the virtues of royal manhood.

The third scene of the first act introduces another group of personages, distinguished figures of the Danish Court. Laertes is the cultured young gentleman of the period*. He is accomplished, chivalric, gallant, but the accomplishments are superficial, the chivalry theatrical, the gallantry of a showy kind. He is master of events up to a certain point, because he sees their coarse, gaudy, superficial significance. It is his part to do fine things and make fine speeches, to enter the king's presence gallantly demanding atonement for his father's murder, to leap into his sister's grave and utter a theatrical rant of sorrow. Hamlet sees in his own cause an image of that of Laertes. Each has lost a father by foul means, and Laertes delays not to seek revenge. But Shakspeare does not make the contrast between Hamlet and Laertes favourable to the latter. No overweight of thought, no susceptibility of conscience

* Gervinus has described Hamlet as a man of a civilized period standing in the centre of a heroic age of rough manners and physical daring—Shakspeare Commentaries, vol. II., p. 161. No piece of criticism could fall more wide of the mark. The age of Claudius, Polonius, Laertes, Osric, and of the students of philosophy at Wittenberg is an age complex and refined, and in all things the reverse of heroic. See Kreyssig, Vorlesungen über Shakspeare, vol. II. p. 222 (ed. 1862).

retard the action of the young gallant He readily falls in with the king's scheme of assassination, and adds his private contribution of villainy—the venom on his rapier's point Laertes has been no student of philosophic Wittenberg* The French capital, "so dear to the average, sensual man," is Laertes' school of education What lessons he learnt there we may conjecture from the conversation of Polonius with his servant Reynaldo

Laertes' little sister, Ophelia, is loved by the Lord Hamlet What is Ophelia? Can she contribute to the deliverance of Hamlet from his sad life of brooding thought, from his weakness and his melancholy? Juliet had delivered Romeo from his dream of self-conscious egoistic feeling into the reality of anguish and of joy What can Ophelia do? Nothing She is a tender little fragile soul, who might have grown to her slight perfection in some neat garden-plot of life Hamlet falls into the too frequent error of supposing that a man gains rest and composure through the presence of a nature weak, gentle, and clinging, and that the very incapacity of such a nature to share the troubles of heart and brain, which beset one must be a source of refreshment and repose And so it is, for moments, when the pathos of slender joy, unaware of the great interests and sorrows of the world, touches us But a strong nature was what Hamlet really needed. All the comfort he ever got in life came from one who was "more an antique Roman than a Dane," his friend Horatio If he had found one

* Shakspeare remembered Luther, thinks Gervinus He had Giordano Bruno in his mind, says Tschischwitz. The University was famous Giordano Bruno names it the Athens of Germany

who to Horatio's fortitude, his passive strength, had added ardour and enthusiasm, Hamlet's melancholy must have vanished away, he would have been lifted up into the light and strength of the good facts of the world, and then he could not have faltered upon his way

As things were Hamlet quickly learned, and the knowledge embittered him, that Ophelia could neither receive great gifts of soul, nor in return render equivalent gifts. There is an exchange of little tokens between the lovers, but of the large exchange of soul there is none, and Hamlet in his bitter mood can truthfully exclaim, "I never gave you aught" Hamlet was conscious of no constraining power to prevent him, when he thought of his mother's frailty, from extending his words to her whole sex, "Frailty, thy name is woman" Had a noble nature stood in Ophelia's place to utter such words would have been treason against his inmost consciousness. Let the reader contrast Juliet's commanding energy of feeling, of imagination, of will with Ophelia's timidity and self-distrust, the incapable sweetness and gentleness of her heart, her docility to all lawful guardians and governors. Juliet throws off father, mother, and nurse, and stands in solitary strength of love, she always uses the directest word, always counsels the bravest action. In his later plays Shakspeare can still be seen to rejoice and expand in presence of the courage of true love. Desdemona,

A maiden never bold,
Of spirit so still and quiet that her motion
Blush'd at herself,

standing by Othello's side can confront her indignant

father, with the Duke and magnificoes Imogen, for Posthumus' sake, can shoot against the king her shafts of indignant scorn, so keen and exquisite, yet heavily timbered enough to wing forward through the wind of Cymbeline's anger But Ophelia is decorous and timid, with no initiative in her own heart, unimaginative, choosing her phrases with a sense of maidenly propriety —

He hath, my lord, of late made many tenders
Of his affection to me

And Polonius inquires, "Do you believe his tenders, as you call them?" "I do not know, my lord, what I should think" It may be that her brother and father are right, that the "holy vows" of Hamlet on which she, poor little soul, had relied, are but "springs to catch woodcocks" In her madness, the impression made upon her by the words of Polonius and Laertes, which she had until then concealed, finds utterance "She says she hears there's tricks i' the world" Juliet resolved her doubts, not by consulting old Capulet or her nurse, but by pressing forward to perfect knowledge of the heart of Romeo, and by occupying that heart with a purity of passion only less than her own Ophelia, when her father directs her to distrust the man she loves, to deny him her presence, to repel his letters, has only her meek, little submission to utter, "I shall obey, my lord"

The comic element in this scene is present, but is not obtruded Shakspeare, "der feine Shakspeare, der Schalk,"*

* F Th. Vischer, in Jahrbuch der Deutschen Shakespeare Gesellschaft, vol. II., p 149

smiles visibly, but restrains himself from downright laughter. Laertes has read his moral lecture to Ophelia, and she in turn ventures upon a gentle, little piece of sisterly advice. Laertes suddenly discovers that he ought to be aboard his ship. "I stay too long." Ophelia "is giving the conversation a needless and inconvenient turn," for sisters to lecture brothers is an inversion of the natural order of things.* But at this moment the venerable chamberlain appears. Laertes, who was supposed to have gone, is caught. There is only one mode of escape from the imminent scolding—to kneel and ask a second blessing. What matter that it has all been said once before? Start the old man on his hobby of uttering wisdom, and off he will go —

A double blessing is a double grace,
Occasion smiles upon a second leave

The advice of Polonius is a cento of quotations from Lyly's "Euphues"†. Its significance must be looked for less in the matter than in the sententious manner. Polonius has been wise with the little wisdom of worldly prudence. He has been a master of indirect means of getting at the truth, "windlaces and assays of bias". In the shallow lore of life he has been learned. Of true

* C. E. Moberly. Rugby edition of "Hamlet," p. 21

† Mr W. L. Rushton, in his "Shakespeare's Euphuism," pp. 44-47 (London, 1871), places side by side the precepts of Polonius and of Euphues. "*Pol* Give thy thoughts no tongue. *Euph* Be not lavish of thy tongue. *Pol* Do not dull thy palm, &c. *Euph* Every one that shaketh thee by the hand is not joined to thee in heart. *Pol* Beware of entrance to a quarrel, &c. *Euph* Be not quarrellous for every light occasion. *Pol* Give every man thine ear, but few thy voice. *Euph* It shall be there better to hear what they say, than to speak what thou thinkest." Both Polonius and Euphues speak of the advice given as "these few precepts."

wisdom he has never had a gleam And what Shakspeare wishes to signify in this speech is that wisdom of Polonius' kind consists of a set of maxims, all such wisdom might be set down for the headlines of copy-books That is to say, his wisdom is not the outflow of a rich or deep nature, but the little, accumulated hoard of a long and superficial experience This is what the sententious manner signifies And very rightly Shakspeare has put into Polonius' mouth the noble lines,

To thine own self be true,
And it must follow as the night the day
Thou canst not then be false to any man

Yes, Polonius has got one great truth among his copy-book maxims, but it comes in as a little bit of hard, un-vital wisdom like the rest "*Dress well, don't lend or borrow money, to thine own self be true*" *

But to appreciate and enjoy fully the Chamberlain's morality, we must observe him in the first scene of the second act Reynaldo is despatched as a spy upon the conduct of the son on whom the paternal blessing had been so tenderly bestowed Polonius does not expect morality of an ideal kind from the boy As is natural, Laertes in Paris will sow his wild oats If he come back the accomplished cavalier, skilful in manage of his horse, a master of fencing, able to finger a lute, Polonius will treasure up in his heart, not discontented, the knowledge of his son's "wild slips and sallies" †

* Compare and contrast with the advice of Polonius the parting words of the Countess to Beffrum—(All's Well that Ends Well, Act 1, Scene 1) Observe how the speech of the Countess opens and ends with motherly passion of fear and pride, in which lies enclosed her little effort at moral precept

† The last words of Polonius to Reynaldo are—"And let him [Laertes] ply his music" On these words Vischer observes—"Die

Meanwhile Hamlet, in the midst of his sterile world-weariness, has received a shock, but not the shock of joy. His father's spirit is abroad. With Horatio and Marcellus, Hamlet on the platform at night is awaiting the appearance of the ghost. The sounds of Claudius' revelry reach their ears. Hamlet is started upon a series of reflections suggested by the Danish drinking customs, his surroundings disappear; he has ceased to remember the purpose with which he has come hither, he is lost in his own thoughts. The Ghost is present before Hamlet is aware, it is Horatio who interrupts his meditation, and rouses him to behold the apparition. No sooner has Hamlet heard the word "Murder" upon his father's lips than he is addrest to "sweep to his revenge,"—in the idea,—

With wings as swift
As meditation or the thoughts of love

He will change his entire mental stock and store, he will forget his arts and his philosophies, he will retain no thought save of his murdered father. And when the ghost departs he draws—"not his sword, but his notebook"*. There at least he can get it down in black and white that the smiling Claudius is a villain, can put that fact beyond the reach of doubt or vicissitude, for subjective impressions, Hamlet is too well aware, do not retain the certitude which during one vivid moment

par Wortchen erst enthalten den ganzen Schlüssel, der Sohn darf spielen, trinken, raufen, fluchen, zanken, in saubere Häuser, "edelicet Bordelle" gehen, wenn er nur Musik treibt, "echte Cavalierserziehung". Die realistische Shakespeare-Kritik und Hamlet, von F. Th. Vischer in Jahrbuch der deutschen Shakespeare-Gesellschaft, vol. II, p. 149.

* W. Oehlmann, Jahrbuch der Deutschen Shakespeare Gesellschaft vol. III p. 211.

seemed to characterise them. He will henceforth remember nothing but the ghost, and to assure himself of *that*, he sets down his father's parting words, "Adieu, adieu! remember me" That is to say, "he puts a knot upon his handkerchief" * He is conscious that he is not made for the world of action, that the fact is always in process of gliding away from him and being replaced by an idea. And he is resolved to guard against this in the present instance.

It is now in a sudden inspiration of excited feeling that Hamlet conceives the possibility of his assuming an antic disposition. What is Hamlet's purpose in this? He finds that he is involuntarily conducting himself in a wild and unintelligible fashion. He has escaped "from his own feelings of the overwhelming and supernatural by a wild transition to the ludicrous,—a sort of cunning bravado, bordering on the flights of delirium." His mind struggles "to resume its accustomed course, and effect a dominion over the awful shapes and sounds that have usurped its sovereignty" † He assumes madness as a means of concealing his actual disturbance of mind. His over-excitability may betray him, but if it be a received opinion that his mind is unhinged, such an access of

* Hebler, Aufsätze über Shakespeare (Bern, 1865), p. 138

† The first quotation is from S. T. Coleridge, the second from an essay by Hartley Coleridge, "On the Character of Hamlet" Essays and Marginalia, vol. 1 pp. 151-171. An earlier writer than S. T. Coleridge had well said, "Hamlet was fully sensible how strange those involuntary improprieties must appear to others. he was conscious he could not suppress them. he knew he was surrounded with spies, and he was justly apprehensive lest his suspicions or purposes should be discovered. But how are these consequences to be prevented? By counterfeiting an insanity which in part exists"—Richardson's Essays on Shakespeare's Dramatic Characters (1786), p. 163

over-excitement will pass unobserved and unstudied. At this moment Hamlet's immediate need is to calm himself, to escape into solitude, there to recover self-mastery, and come to a clear understanding of the altered state of things. In the light of the court he is persecuted by the eyes of the curious and the suspicious, he is "too much i' the sun". To be in presence of all, and yet to be hidden,—to be intelligible to himself, and a perplexity to others, to be within reach of everyone, and to be himself inaccessible, that would be an enviable position! Madness possesses exquisite immunities and privileges. From the safe vantage of unintelligibility he can delight himself by uttering his whole mind and sending forth his words among the words of others, with their meaning disguised, as he himself must be, clothed in an antic garb of parable, dark sayings which speak the truth in a mystery.

Hamlet does not assume madness to conceal any plan of revenge. He possesses no such plan. And as far as his active powers are concerned, the assumed madness is a misfortune. Instead of assisting him to achieve anything, it is one of the causes which tend to retard his action. For now, instead of forcing himself upon the world, and compelling it to accept a mandate of his will, he can enjoy the delight of a mere observer and critic, an observer and critic both of himself and of others. He can understand and mock, whereas he ought to set himself sternly to his piece of work. He utters himself henceforth at large, because he is unintelligible. He does not aim at producing any effect with his speech, except in the instance of his appeal to Gertude's con-

science His words are not deeds They are uttered self-indulgently to please the intellectual or artistic part of him, or to gratify his passing mood of melancholy, of irritation or of scorn He bewilders Polonius with mockery, which effects nothing, but which bitterly delights Hamlet by its subtlety and cleverness He speaks with singular openness to his courtier friends, because they, filled with thoughts of worldly advancement and ambition, read all his meanings upside down, and the heart of his mystery is absolutely inaccessible to their shallow wits When he describes to them his melancholy he is in truth speaking in solitude to himself Nothing is easier than to throw them off the scent "A knavish speech sleeps in a foolish ear" The exquisite cleverness of his mimetics and his mockery is some compensation to Hamlet for his inaction, this intellectual versatility, this agility flatters his consciousness, and it is only on occasions that he is compelled to observe into what a swoon or syncope his will has fallen

Yet it has been truly said that only one who feels Hamlet's strength should venture to speak of Hamlet's weakness That in spite of difficulties without, and inward difficulties, he still clings to his terrible duty,—letting it go indeed for a time, but returning to it again, and in the end accomplishing it—implies strength He is not incapable of vigorous action,—if only he be allowed no chance of thinking the fact away into an idea He is the first to board the pirate, he stabs Polonius through the arras, he suddenly alters the sealed commission, and sends his schoolfellows to the English headsman, he finally executes justice upon the king But all his ac-

tion is sudden and fragmentary, it is not continuous and coherent. His violent excitability exhausts him, after the night of encounter with the ghost a fit of abject despondency, we may be certain, ensued, which had begun to set in when the words were uttered,—

[The time is out of joint, O, cursed spite
That ever I was born to set it right]

After he has slain Polonius, he weeps, after his struggle with Laertes in Ophelia's grave a mood of depression ensues —

Thus awhile the fit will work on him,
Anon as patient as the female dove,
When that her golden couplets are disclosed,
His silence will sit drooping

His feelings are not under control. They quickly fatigue themselves, like a dog who now hurries before his master, and now drops behind, but will not advance steadily *

At the moment when Polonius has dismissed Reynaldo, Ophelia comes running to her father, "Alas, my lord, I have been so affrighted!" Such is the piteously inadequate response of Ophelia to Hamlet's mute confession of his sorrow. His letters have been repelled, her presence has been denied to him. Hamlet resolves that he will see her, and hear her speak. He goes, profoundly agitated, in the disordered attire which is now nothing unusual with him, and which constitutes part of Hamlet's "transformation." He is not in the mood to consider very attentively particulars of the toilet. He discovers Ophelia sewing in her closet. He

* The illustration is Hebler's.

stands unable to speak, holding her hand, gazing in her face, trying to discover if there be in her any virtue or strength, anything which can give a shadow of hope that the widening gulf between them is not quite impassable. He endeavours to make a new study of her soul through her eyes. And in her eyes he reads—*fright*. The most piteous part of the incident is that Ophelia is wholly blameless. She is shocked, bewildered, alarmed, anxious to run away, and get under the protection of her father. No wonder Hamlet cannot utter a word! No wonder that his gesture expresses absolute confirmation of his unhappy fears, utter despair of finding virtue in her! A sigh rises from the depths of his spirit. He feels that all is over. He knows how strange and remote his voice would sound. And as Hamlet can feel nothing without generalising he recognises in this failure of heart to answer heart a type of one great sorrow of the world.

Polonius receives from the docile Ophelia the letters of Hamlet. She does not shrink from betraying the secrets of his weakness and his melancholy confided to her. The oddest of the letters, that which seemed most incoherent, is carried off to be read aloud to the king,—Ophelia consenting. What is the purport of this letter? Was it meant as a kind of test? Did Hamlet wish to ascertain whether Ophelia would be puzzled by the superficial oddity of it, or would penetrate to the grief and the love which lay beneath it? "He that hath ears to hear let him hear"—upon this principle Hamlet constantly acts. He is content that the feeble-hearted and dull witted should find him a puzzle and an offence

The Prince comes by reading Polonius accosts him, assuming that Hamlet is downright mad Hamlet's irony here consists in his adoption and exaggeration of the ideas of Polonius "You have immured your daughter, you have repelled my letters, and denied me sight of her, O wise old man! for woman's virtue is the frailest of things, and there is no male creature who is not a corrupter of virtue If the most glorious and vivifying thing in the universe, the sun, will breed maggots out of carrion, truly Prince Hamlet may be suspected! Beware of your daughter, Friend look to't" And then, in more direct fashion, Hamlet breaks forth into a satire on old men with their weak hams and most plentiful lack of wit Polonius retires bewildered, and two new persecutors appear

In Goethe's novel, "*Wilhelm Meister*," the hero, when adapting the play of Hamlet to the German stage, alters it in certain particulars Serlo, the manager of the theatre, suggests that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern should be "compressed into one" "Heaven keep me from all such curtailments," exclaims Wilhelm, "they destroy at once the sense and the effect What these two persons are and do, it is impossible to represent by one In such small matters, we discover Shakspeare's greatness These soft approaches, this smirking and bowing, this assenting, wheedling, flattering, this whisking agility, this wagging of the tail, this allness and emptiness, this legal knavery, this ineptitude and insipidity, how can they be expressed by a single man? There ought to be at least a dozen of these people if they could be had, for it is only in society that they are anything, they

are society itself, and Shakspeare showed no little wisdom and discernment in bringing in a pair of them "What Goethe admirably expresses, Shakspeare "der Schalk," has perhaps hinted in the address of the king and queen to the pair of courtiers

King Thanks, Rosencrantz and gentle Guildenstern

Queen Thanks, Guildenstern and gentle Rosencrantz

That is, "six to one, and half a dozen to the other" With no tie of friendship, or capacity for true human comradeship, the companions hunt in a couple, and they go with the same indistinguishable smirking and bowing to their fate in England There is grim irony in this ending of the courtiers' history "They were lovely, and pleasant in their lives," after the taste of Claudius' court, "and in their death they were not divided" [.]

In the first scene of the third act Ophelia is stationed as a decoy to expose to her father and the king, the disease of the man she loves It will assist, she is assured, to bring about Hamlet's restoration, and Ophelia is docile, and does not question her instructors A book of devotions is placed in her hand* Hamlet comes by, brooding upon suicide, upon the manifold ills

* Polonius (giving the book), says.—

Read on this book,

That show of such an *exercise* may colour

Your loneliness We are oft to blame in this,—

'Tis too much proved,—that with devotion's visage,

And pious action, we do sugar o'er

The devil himself.

Hamlet seeing her at prayer exclaims,

Nymph, in thy orisons

Be all my sins remembered.

of the world, and his own weakness. He sees Ophelia, so lovely, so child-like, so innocent, praying. She is for a moment something better and more beautiful than woman, something "afar from the sphere of his sorrow," and he involuntarily exclaims,

Nymph, in thy orisons {
Be all my sins remembered

But Ophelia plays her part with a manner that betrays her. Observe the four rhymed lines, ending with the little set sentence (which looks as if prepared beforehand)

For to the noble mind
Rich gifts wax poor when givers prove unkind

And then, upon the spot, the Prince's presents are produced. How could Hamlet, endowed with swift penetration as he is, fail to detect the fraud? He had unmasked Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, and thereby his suspicions had been quickened. And as for a moment he had been touched and exalted by the presence of Ophelia's innocence and piety, he is now proportionately indignant.

One of the deepest characteristics of Hamlet's nature, is a longing for sincerity, for truth in mind and manners, an aversion from all that is false, affected or exaggerated. * Ophelia is joined with the rest of them, she is an impostor, a spy, incapable of truth, of honour, of love. Have they desired to observe an outbreak of his insanity? He will give it to them with a vengeance. With an

* False, as the bearing of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, affected as the manner of Osric, exaggerated, as Laertes' theatrical rant in Ophelia's grave.

almost savage zeal, which is underneath nothing but bitter pain, he pounces upon Ophelia's deceit "Ha, ha, are you honest?" His cruelty is that of an idealist, who cannot precisely measure the effect of his words upon his hearer, but who requires to liberate his mind. And again Hamlet plays bitterly at approving of the principles and conduct of Polonius in the matter of his relations with Ophelia "You have been secluded from that dangerous corrupter of youth, Prince Hamlet, you love to devote yourself to prayer and solitude Most wise and right! I am all that your father has represented me, and worse—very proud, revengeful, ambitious [all that Hamlet was *not*] And yet there is in the world such a thing as calumny, it may happen to touch yourself some day You who are so fair and frail, so pious in appearance, so false in deed, do you look on us *men* as dangerous to virtue? I have heard a little of women's doings too keep your precious virtue, if you can, and let us male monsters be Get thee to a nunnery!" And to complete the startling effect of this outbreak of insanity, solicited by his persecutors, he sends a shaft after the Chamberlain, and a shaft after the King —

Ham Where's your father?

Oph [*Coming out with her docile little lily*] At home, my lord

Ham Let the doors be shut upon him, that he may play the fool nowhere but in his own house

This for Polonius, and for the King with menacing emphasis the words are uttered, "I say we will have no more marriages those that are married already, all but one, shall live, the rest shall keep as they are. To a nunnery, go!"

Hamlet bursts out of the lobby with a triumphant and yet bitter sense of having turned the tables upon his tormentors. He has thrown into sudden confusion the ranks of the enemy. Ophelia remains to weep. In the pauses of Hamlet's cruel invective, she had uttered her piteous, little appeals to heaven. "Heavenly powers, restore him!" "O help him, you sweet heavens!" When he abruptly departs, the poor girl's sorrow overflows. In her lament, Hamlet's noble reason, which is overthrown, somehow gets mixed up with the elegance of his costume, which has suffered equal ruin. He who was the "glass of fashion," noticed by every one, "the observed of all observers," is a hopeless lunatic. She has no bitter thought about her lover. She is "of ladies most deject and wretched," all her emotion is helpless tenderness and sorrow. Her grief is as deep as her soul is deep.

Hamlet now binds himself more closely than ever to Horatio. This friend and fellow-scholar is the one sterling thing in the rotten state of Denmark. There is a touching devotion shown by Hamlet to Horatio in the meeting which follows the scene in the lobby with Ophelia, a devotion which is the overflow of gratitude for the comfort and refuge he finds with his friend after the recent proof of the incapacity and want of integrity in the woman he had loved. Horatio's equanimity, his evenness of temper, is like solid land to Hamlet after the tossings and tumult of his own heart. The Prince apologises with beautiful delicacy, for seeming to flatter Horatio. It is not flattery, what can he expect from a man so poor? It is genuine delight in the sanity, the

strength, the constancy of Horatio's character Yet all the while Shakspeare compels us to feel that it is Hamlet with his manifold weakness, and ill-commingled blood and judgment, who is the rarer nature of the two, and that Horatio is made to be his helpmate, recognising in service his highest duty

There is no Friar Laurence in this play To him the Catholic children of Verona¹ carried their troubles, and received from their father comfort and counsel Hamlet is hardly the man to seek for wisdom or for succour from a priest Let them resolve his doubts about the soul, about immortality, about God first But Shakspeare has taken care to show us in the effete society of Denmark, where everything needs renewing, what religion is To Ophelia's funeral the Church reluctantly sends her representative All that the occasion suggests of harsh, formal, and essentially inhuman dogmatics, is uttered by the Priest The distracted girl has by untimely accident met her death, and therefore, instead of charitable prayers,

Shards, flints, and pebbles should be thrown on her
These are the sacred words of truth, of peace, of consolation which Religion has to whisper to wounded hearts!

We should profane the service of the dead,
To sing a requiem and such rest to her
As to peace-parted souls

This is the religion which helps to make Claudius a palterer with his conscience, and Hamlet an aimless wanderer after truth Better consort in Denmark with players than with priests!*

* H. A. Werner Jahrbuch der Deutschen Shakspeare Gesellschaft, vol. v, p 56

When the play is about to be enacted Hamlet declines a seat near his mother, because he wishes to occupy a position from which he can scrutinize the king's countenance. He is now fully roused, every nerve high-strung. Just at present Ophelia is nothing to him. If he say anything to her it will be for the sake of staying his own heart in its tremulous intensity, and getting through the eager moments of suspense. It will be something issuing from the bitter upper surface of his soul—a bitter jest most likely. Hamlet derives an acrid pleasure from perplexing and embarrassing Polonius, and Rosencrantz, and Guildenstern. Now it pleases him to embarrass Ophelia with half-ambiguous obscenities. These are the electrical sparks which scintillate and snap while the current is streaming to its receptacle. With Ophelia, who cherished the proprieties as though they constituted the moral law, Hamlet finds himself tempted to be intolerably improper. Ophelia understands his words, and ventures to deliver a gentle reprimand. "You are naught, you are naught, I'll mark the play." But Hamlet continues his persecution. All this comes from the superficial part of Hamlet, as one toys with some trifle while a doom is impending. His passion is concentrated in watching the countenance of the king.*

This is the night of Hamlet's triumph. The king's guilt is unkennelled, Hamlet disposes of one after another of his tormentors, he has superabundant energy, he takes each in turn, and is equal to all.

* On the speech of "some dozen or sixteen lines" which Hamlet inserts in the play, see the discussion by Prof Seeley, Mr Malletson and others, "New Shak. Soc. Trans 1874"

And yet Hamlet is for ever walking over the ice, his power of self-control is never quite to be trusted. The success of his device for ascertaining the guilt of Claudius is followed by the same mood of wild excitement which followed the encounter with his father's spirit, again he seems incoherently, extravagantly gay, again his words are "wild and whirling words"*. And as on that occasion Hamlet had felt the need of calming himself, and in his somewhat fantastic way had expressed that need, "For my own poor part, look you, I'll go pray," so now he calls for music, "Come, some music, come the recorders!" But he is haunted by the irrepressible Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. With them Hamlet is now severely and imperiously courteous, now enigmatical, now ironical. At last, when he advances to interpret his parable of the recorders, he becomes terribly direct and frank. The courtiers are silenced, they have not the spirit even to mutter a lie. And having disposed of them, Hamlet takes in hand Polonius. He is assuming the offensive with his foes. He steps forward to assist the old chamberlain to expose his folly, he lends him a hand to render himself contemptible. Next Hamlet hastens to his mother's closet†. He has

* On the line "A very, very—pajock," see the article on Shakspeare in *Edinburgh Review*, October 1872, pp. 361, 362.

† Of the speech in presence of the praying Claudius, Richardson had said what S. T. Coleridge, in other words, repeated, "I venture to affirm that these are not Hamlet's real sentiments." Notice that the ghost appears precisely at the point where Hamlet's words respecting Claudius are most vituperative. Hamlet is immediately sensible that he is weakening his heart with words, and has neglected deeds. The air, which had been so heated, seems to grow icy, and the temperature of Hamlet's passion suddenly falls—to rise again by-and-by.

words that must be spoken. He has a great essay to make towards the deliverance of a human soul from the bondage of corruption. The slaughter of Polonius appears to him a trivial incident by the way, it does not affect him until he has spent his powers in the effort to uplift his mother's weak soul, and breathe into it strength and courage and constancy. Then in the exhaustion which succeeds his effort, his tears flow fast.

In the dawn of the following morning Hamlet is despatched to England. From this time forward he acts, if not with continuity and with a plan, at least with energy. He has fallen in love with action, but the action is sudden, convulsive, and interrupted. He is abandoning himself more than previously to his chances of achieving things, and thinks less of forming any consistent scheme. The death of Polonius was accidental, and Hamlet recognised, or tried to recognise in it (since in his own will the deed had no origin) the pleasure of heaven.

I do repent but heaven hath pleased it so,
 To punish me with this, and this with me,
 That I must be their scourge and minister

When about to depart for England, Hamlet accepts the necessity with as resolute a spirit as may be, believing, or trying to believe, that he and his concerns are in the hand of God.

Ham. For England!
 King Ay, Hamlet
 Ham Good
 King So is it, if thou knew'st our purposes
 Ham. I see a cherub that sees them

That is, My times are in God's hand. Again, when he

reflects that acting upon a sudden impulse, in which there was nothing voluntary (for the deed was accomplished before he had conceived what it was), he had sent his two schoolfellows to death, Hamlet's thoughts go on to discover the divine purpose in the event

Let us know

Our indiscretion sometimes serves us well,
When our deep plots do pall, and that should teach us
There's a divinity that shapes our ends,
Rough-hew them how we will

Horatio

That is most certain

Once more, when Horatio bids the prince yield to the secret misgiving which troubled his heart before he went to the trial of skill with Laertes, Hamlet puts aside his friend's advice with the words, "We defy augury, there's a special providence in the fall of a sparrow. If it be now, 'tis not to come, if it be not to come, it will be now, if it be not now, yet it will come, the readiness is all"

Does Shakspeare accept the interpretation of events which Hamlet is led to adopt? No, the providence in which Shakspeare believed is a moral order which includes man's highest exercise of foresight, energy, and resolution. The disposition of Hamlet to reduce to a minimum the share which man's conscious will and foresight have in the disposing of events, and to enlarge the sphere of the action of powers outside the will has a dramatic, not a theological significance. Helena, who clearly sees what she resolves to do, and accomplishes neither less nor more than she has resolved, professes a different creed

Our remedies oft in ourselves do lie,
Which we ascribe to heaven, the fated sky
Gives us free scope, only doth backward pull
Our slow designs when we ourselves are dull.*

Horatio, a believer in the "divinity that shapes our ends," by his promised explanation of the events, delivers us from the transcendental optimism of Hamlet, and restores the purely human way of viewing things

Give order that these bodies
High on a stage be placed to the view,
And let me speak to the yet unknowing world
How these things came about so shall you hear
Of carnal, bloody, and unnatural acts,
Of accidental judgments, casual slaughters,
Of deaths put on by cunning and forced cause,
And in this upshot purposes mistook,
Fall'n on the inventors' heads all this can I
Truly deliver

The arrival of Fortinbras contributes also to the restoration of a practical and positive feeling. With none of the rare qualities of the Danish Prince, he excels him in plain grasp of ordinary fact. Shakspeare knows that the success of these men who are limited, definite, positive, will do no dishonour to the failure of the rarer natures, to whom the problem of living is more embarrassing, and for whom the tests of the world are stricter and more delicate. Shakspeare "beats triumphant marches" not for successful persons alone, but also "for conquered and slain persons."

Does Hamlet finally attain deliverance from his disease of will? Shakspeare has left the answer to that question doubtful. Probably if anything could supply

* All's Well that Ends Well, Act 1 Sc 1

the link which was wanting between the purpose and the deed, it was the achievement of some supreme action. The last moments of Hamlet's life are well spent, and for energy and foresight are the noblest moments of his existence, he snatches the poisoned bowl from Horatio, and saves his friend, he gives his dying voice for Fortinbras, and saves his country. The rest is silence.

Had I but time—as this fell sergeant, death,
Is strict in his arrest—O, I could tell you

But he has not told. Let us not too readily assume that we “know the stops” of Hamlet, that we can “pluck out the heart of his mystery.”

One thing, however, we *do* know—that the man who wrote the play of Hamlet had obtained a thorough comprehension of Hamlet's malady. And assured, as we are by abundant evidence, that Shakspeare transformed with energetic will his knowledge into fact, we may be confident that when Hamlet was written, Shakspeare had gained a further stage in his culture of self-control, and that he had become not only adult as an author, but had entered upon the full maturity of his manhood.

* To refer even to the best portion of the immense Hamlet literature would require considerable space. I believe my study of the play is indebted chiefly to the article by H. A. Werner in *Jahrbuch der Deutschen Shakespeare Gesellschaft*, vol. v, and to an essay by my friend, J. Todhunter, M.D., read before the Dublin University Shakspeare Society. The doctors of the insane have been studious of the state of Hamlet's mind—Doctors Ray, Kellogg, Conolly, Maudsley, Bucknill. They are unanimous in wishing to put Hamlet under judicious medical treatment, but they find it harder than Polonius did to hit upon a definition of madness — •

For to define true madness
What is't but to be nothing else but mad?

The critics are nearly equally divided in their estimates of Ophelia. Flathe is extravagantly hostile to the Polonius family. Mr Ruskin (*Sesame and Lilies*) may be mentioned among English writers as forming no favourable estimate of Ophelia, and against Mrs Jameson's authority, we may set the authority of a lady writer in *Jahrbuch der Deutschen Shakespeare Gesellschaft*, vol. ii., pp 16 36. Vischer chivalrously defends Ophelia, and Hebler coincides. The study of Hamlet, by Benno Tschischwitz, is learned and ingenious. H. von Friesen's "*Briefe über Shakespeare's Hamlet*" contains much more than its name implies, and is indeed a study of the entire development of Shakspeare. Sir Edward Strachey's "*Shakspeare's Hamlet*," 1848, interprets the play throughout in a different sense from the interpretation attempted in this chapter. See especially what is called "*Hamlet's final discovery*," pp 91 93.

Werder's "*Vorlesungen über Shakespeare's Hamlet*" 1875, presents with remarkable force the view that Hamlet's was *not* a weak nature. Mr Frank Marshall's "*A Study of Hamlet*" if less brilliant is, I think, more sound. Last must be mentioned Mr Furness's magnificent Variorum edition of the play in two volumes, 1877.

CHAPTER IV.

THE ENGLISH HISTORICAL PLAYS

THE historical plays of Shakspeare may be approached from many sides. It would be interesting to endeavour to ascertain from them what was Shakspeare's political creed * It would be interesting to compare his method as artist when handling historical matter with that of some other great dramatist,—with that of Schiller when writing “Wallenstein,” or Goethe when writing “Egmont,” or Victor Hugo when writing “Cromwell” Shakspeare's opinions, however, and Shakspeare's method as artist are less than Shakspeare himself. It is the man we are still seeking to discover—behind his works, behind his opinions, behind his artistic process. Shakspeare's life, we must believe, ran on below his art, and was to himself of deeper import than his work as artist. Not perhaps his material life, though to this also he contrived to make his art contribute, but the life of his inmost being. To him art was not, as it has been

* See on this subject Shakspeare-Forschungen by Benno Tschischwitz, III.—Shakspeare's Staat und Königthum. The writer dwells on the moral and religious character of the relation between king and people as conceived by Shakspeare. He says well, “Für Shakspeare nämlich ist das Königthum durchaus nicht die gekrönte Spitze einer Pyramide, sondern der lebendige Mittelpunkt eines organischen Ganzen, nach welchem zu das Gesamtleben des Organismus pulst,” p. 84. See the subsequent chapter in this volume upon “The Roman Plays,” pp. 276-336.

to some poets and painters and musicians, a temple-worship, a devotion of self, a surrender which is at once blissful and pathetic to some presence greater and nobler than oneself. Of such pathos we discover none in Shakspeare's life. He possessed his art, and was not possessed by it. With him poetry was not, as it was with Keats, or as it was with Shelley, a passion from which deliverance was impossible. Shakspeare delivered himself from his life as artist with quiet determination, and found it well to enjoy his store of worldly success, and learn to possess his soul among the fields and streams of Stratford, before there came an end of all. The main question therefore which it is desirable to put in the case of the historical plays now to be considered is this—What was Shakspeare gaining for himself of wisdom or of strength while these were the organs through which his faculties of thought and imagination nourished themselves, inhaling and exhaling their breath of life? • That Shakspeare should have accomplished so great an achievement towards the interpreting of history is much,—that he should have grasped in thought the national life of England during a century and upwards, in her periods of disaster and collapse, of civil embroilment, and of heroic union and exaltation,—this is much. But that by his study of history Shakspeare should have built up his own moral nature, and have fortified himself for the conduct of life, was, we may surmise, to Shakspeare the chief outcome of his toil.

And certainly not the least remarkable thing about these historical plays is that while each is an effort so earnest to realise objective fact, at the same time they

disclose so much of the writer's personality. Even Shakspeare cannot transcend himself. Facts must group and organise themselves before they become available for the service of art, and for each artist they group themselves around his strongest feelings and most cherished convictions respecting human life. If by favourable chance hands at work among confused slips of ancient parchment were to lay hold of the inventory of Shakspeare's goods and chattels, if it were ascertained what household stuff the poet had gathered around him at Stratford, the information would be eagerly welcomed as throwing light upon the obscure story of his worldly career. But here in these historical plays and in all his plays, are documents written over everywhere with facts about Shakspeare. The facts are there,—must be there. What is required to ascertain them can be nothing but eyes to which those facts will disclose themselves.

If the outline of Shakspeare's character sketched in these pages be at all a genuine likeness, we shall not think of him merely or chiefly as the gay, genial quick-witted haunter of the Mermaid, careering in light defiance around the bulk of Ben Jonson's mind, we shall not remember him as the Shakspeare about whose deer-stealing expeditions in the country, and less innocent adventures in town, stories of dubious authority have come down to us. We shall rather think of him as a man possessing immense potential strength, but aware of certain weaknesses of his own nature, resolved therefore to be stern with himself and to master those weaknesses, resolved to realise all that potential strength which lay within him. That his sensitiveness to

pleasure and to pain was of extraordinary range and delicacy we are certain, we are certain also that he determined he would not leave himself to be the plaything, the thrall or the victim of that sensitiveness. We are accustomed to speak of the tenderness, the infinite tolerance of the genius of Shakspeare. The impartial student must surely be no less impressed by the unyielding justice of Shakspeare, his stern fidelity to fact, and by the large demands he makes upon human character. By much of our passionate intolerance founded upon prejudice, and personal or class-feeling, Shakspeare remained wholly untouched. When we come to Shakspeare and miss our own little bitterness and violences, and find him so large and human, we naturally describe him as tolerant. Shakspeare's tolerance, however, is nothing else but justice, and even his humour, the humour of a man framed for abundant joy and sorrow, has in it something of severity, because he employs it to recover himself from the narrowing intensity of his enthusiasms, and to restore him to the level of everyday fact. In the characters of the weak or the wicked whom he condemns, Shakspeare denies no beautiful or tender trait, but he condemns them without reprieve.

The characters in the historical plays are conceived chiefly with reference to action. The world represented in these plays is not so much the world of feeling or of thought, as the limited world of the practicable. In the great tragedies we are concerned more with what man is than with what he does. At the close of each tragedy we are left with a sense of measureless failure, or with

the stern joy of absolute and concluded attainment. There is something infinite in thought and emotion. We do not think so far, and then stop, beyond the known our thoughts must travel until they are confronted by the unknowable. We do not love, we do not suffer so much and no more, our love is without limitation, and our anguish and our joy cannot be weighed in the balances of earth. But our deeds are definite. And each man when tested by deeds can be brought to a positive standard. The question in this case is not, What has been the life of your soul, what have you thought and suffered and enjoyed? The question is, What have you done? And accordingly in the historical plays we are conscious of a certain limitation, a certain measuring of men by positive achievements and results

{ Action is transitory—a step, a blow,
 { The motion of a muscle—this way or that—
 { 'Tis done, and in the after-vacancy
 { We wonder at ourselves like men betrayed
 { Suffering is permanent, obscure, and dark,
 { And has the nature of infinity

The histories, like the tragedies, are for the reader a school of discipline, but the issues with which they deal are not the infinite issues of life and death, the impression each leaves at the close is not an impression of measureless pathos, or of pain dissolved in perfect joy. They deal with the finite issues of failure or success in the achieving of practical ends, and the feeling which they leave with us is that of a wholesome, mundane pity and terror, or a sane and strong mundane satisfaction

But if the historical plays cannot compete with the tragedies in depth of spiritual significance, they compen-

sate in some measure for this, as Gervinus has observed,
by their breadth and comprehensiveness The life of
man, good or evil, is not seen in its infinite significance
for the individual, but its consequences are shown in a
definite series of events, as a sanative virtue in society,
or as a spreading infection. The mystery of evil is not
here an awful shadow, before which we stand appalled,
striving to accept the darkness which is not understood
for the light's sake, which authenticates and justifies
itself Evil in the historical plays is wrong-doing, which
is followed by inevitable retribution Sir Walter Raleigh,
in the preface to the "History of World," has traced
in a remarkable passage, written possibly to vindicate
his own orthodoxy, the justice of God in the lives of
English Kings "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall
he also reap" "The sins of the fathers shall be visited
upon the children to the third and fourth generation,"
these are the texts of Raleigh's theology of history
Going over the same period of history, Shakspeare, with
an unfaltering hand, exposes the consequences of weak-
ness, of error, and of crime Our greatest living novelist
has insisted with dreadful emphasis upon the irreparable,
irreversible issue still developing itself, of every base
or evil deed Shakspeare denies fact as little as George
Eliot. But he shows us also how the sources of good
are incalculable, he shows us how the consequences of
ill deeds may at a later time be caught up by a flood of
blessing, and may really be borne away for ever into
oblivion It is indeed demonstrably true that the power
which survives an evil act can be subdued or transformed
only at the expense of so much of the virtuous force of

the world Still it is well to be assured that evil even at the expense of good *can* be subdued, such an assurance buoys us above despair. In the stern justice of George Eliot there is a certain idealism which proceeds from a desire for scientific rigour, definiteness, and certitude Shakspeare, possessing himself of the concrete facts of the world with a larger grasp, shows us the mingled web of good and evil, as it actually is, and to draw the threads asunder, and observe each one apart from the rest is hardly less difficult to accomplish in Shakspeare's world of imagination than in that of the veritable life of man.

Setting aside Henry VIII, a play written probably for some special occasion, or upon some special occasion handed over to the dramatist Fletcher to complete, setting aside also the somewhat slight sketch of Edward IV, which appears in King Henry VI, Part III., and in the opening scenes of King Richard III, six full-length portraits of kings of England have been left by Shakspeare. These six fall into two groups of three each,—one group consisting of studies of kingly weakness, the other group of studies of kingly strength. In the one group stand King John, King Richard II, and King Henry VI, in the other King Henry IV, King Henry V, and King Richard III. John is the royal criminal, weak in his criminality, Henry VI is the royal saint, weak in his saintliness. The feebleness of Richard II. cannot be characterised in a word, he is a graceful, sentimental monarch. Richard III., in the other group, is a royal criminal, strong in his crime. Henry IV, the usurping

Bolingbroke, is strong by a fine craft in dealing with events, by resolution and policy, by equal caution and daring. The strength of Henry V is that of plain heroic magnitude, thoroughly sound and substantial, founded upon the eternal verities. Here, then, we may recognise the one dominant subject of the histories, viz, how a man may fail, and how a man may succeed in attaining a practical mastery of the world. These plays are, as Schlegel has named them, a "mirror for kings," and the characters of these plays all lead up to Henry V, the man framed for the most noble and joyous mastery of things.

I

In King John the hour of utmost ebb in the national life of England is investigated by the imagination of the poet. The king reigns neither by warrant of a just title, nor, like Bolingbroke, by warrant of the right of the strongest. He knows that his house is founded upon the sand, he knows that he has no justice of God and no virtue of man on which to rely. Therefore he assumes an air of authority and regal grandeur. But within all is rottenness and shame. Unlike the bold usurper Richard, John endeavours to turn away his eyes from facts of which he is yet aware, he dare not gaze into his own wretched and cowardly soul. When threatened by France with war, and now alone with his mother, John exclaims, making an effort to fortify his heart,—

Our strong possession and our right for us
But Elnor, with a woman's courage and directness, forbids the unavailing self-deceit,—

Your strong possession much more than your right,
Or else it must go wrong with you and me

King Richard, when he would make away with the young princes, summons Tyrrel to his presence, and enquires with cynical indifference to human sentiment,

Dar'st thou resolve to kill a friend of mine?

and when Tyrrel accepts the commission, Richard, in a moment of undisguised exultation, breaks forth with "Thou sing'st sweet music!" John would inspire Hubert with his murderous purpose rather like some vague influence than like a personal will, obscurely as some pale mist works which creeps across the fields, and leaves blight behind it in the sunshine. He trembles lest he should have said too much, he trembles lest he should not have said enough, at last the nearer fear prevails, and the words "death," "a grave," form themselves upon his lips. Having touched a spring which will produce assassination he furtively withdraws himself from the mechanism of crime. It suits the king's interest afterwards that Arthur should be living, and John adds to his crime the baseness of a miserable attempt by chicanery and timorous sophisms to transfer the responsibility of murder from himself to his instrument and accomplice. He would fain darken the eyes of his conscience and of his understanding.

The show of kingly strength and dignity in which John is clothed in the earlier scenes of the play, must therefore be recognised (although Shakspeare does not obtrude the fact), as no more than a poor pretence of true regal strength and honour. The fact, only hinted in these earlier scenes,

becomes afterwards all the more impressive, when the time comes to show this dastard king, who had been so great in the barter of territory, in the sale of cities, in the sacrifice of love and marriage-truth to policy, now changing from pale to red in the presence of his own nobles, now vainly trying to tread back the path of crime, now incapable of enduring the physical suffering of the hour of death. Sensible that he is a king with no inward strength of justice or of virtue, John endeavours to buttress up his power with external supports, against the advice of his nobles he celebrates a second coronation, only forthwith to remove the crown from his head and place it in the hands of an Italian priest Pandulph "of fair Millaine cardinal," who possesses the astuteness and skill to direct the various conflicting forces of the time to his own advantage, Pandulph is the *de facto* master of England, and as he pleases makes peace or announces war

The country, as in periods of doubt and danger, was "possessed with rumours, full of idle dreams" Peter of Pomfret had announced that before Ascension day at noon the king should deliver up his crown. John submits to the degradation demanded of him, and has the incredible baseness to be pleased that he has done so of his own free will

Is this Ascension-day? did not the prophet
Say that before Ascension-day at noon
My crown I should give off? Even so I have
I did suppose it should be on constraint,
But, heaven be thank'd! it is but voluntary

After this we are not surprised that when the Bastard endeavours to rouse him to manliness and resolution,

Away and glister like the god of war
When he intendeth to become the field,

John is not ashamed to announce the "happy peace" which he has made with the Papal legate, on whom he relies for protection against the invaders of England. Faulconbridge still urges the duty of an effort at self-defence, for the sake of honour, and of safety, and the King, incapable of accepting his own responsibilities and privileges, hands over the care of England to his illegitimate nephew, "Have thou the ordering of this present time"

There is little in the play of King John which strengthens or gladdens the heart. In the tug of selfish power, hither and thither, amid the struggle of kingly greeds, and priestly pride, amid the sales of cities, the loveless marriage of princes, the rumours and confusion of the people, a pathetic beauty illumines the boyish figure of Arthur, so gracious, so passive, untouched by the adult rapacities and crimes of the others

Good, my mother, peace !
I would that I were low laid in my grave ,
I am not worth this coil that's made for me

The voice of maternal passion, a woman's voice impotent and shrill, among the unheeding male forces, goes up also from the play. There is the pity of stern, armed men for the ruin of a child's life. These, and the boisterous but genuine and hearty patriotism of Faulconbridge, are the only presences of human virtue or beauty which are to be perceived in the degenerate world depicted by Shakspeare. And the end, like what preceded it, is miserable. The King lies poisoned, over-

mastered by mere physical agony, agony which leaves little room for any pangs of conscience, were the palsied moral nature of the criminal capable of such nobler suffering

I am a scribbled form, drawn with a pen
Upon a parchment, and against this fire
Do I shrink up

II.

Whether any portions of the first part of Henry VI be from the hand of Shakspeare, and if there be, what those portions are, need not be here investigated. The play belongs, in the main, to the pre-Shaksperian school. Shakspeare finds his own genius for the dramatic rendering of history for the first time distinctly in the second and third parts of Henry VI. The writer of the first part does not stand above the characters which he creates, he is violently prejudiced against some, and he feels a lyrical delight in singing the praises of others. But in the treatment of the characters of the King, of Gloster, of York, of Richard, in the later parts of the trilogy the Shaksperian impartiality and irony are clearly discernible. Shakspeare does not hate King Henry, he is as favourably disposed to him as is possible, but he says, with the same clear and definite expression in which the historical fact uttered itself, that this saint of a feeble type upon the throne of England was a curse to the land and to the time only less than a royal criminal as weak as Henry would have been.

The heroic days of the fifth Henry, when the play opens, belong to the past, but their memory

survives in the hearts and in the vigorous muscles of the great lords and earls who surround the king. He only, who most should have treasured and augmented his inheritance of glory and of power, is insensible to the large responsibilities and privileges of his place. He is cold in great affairs, his supreme concern is to remain blameless. Free from all greeds and ambitions, he yet is possessed by egoism, the egoism of timid saintliness. His virtue is negative, because there is no vigorous basis of manhood within him out of which heroic saintliness might develop itself. For fear of what is wrong, he shrinks from what is right. This is not the virtue ascribed to the nearest followers of "the Faithful and True" who in his righteousness doth judge and make war. Henry is passive in the presence of evil, and weeps. He would keep his garments clean, but the garments of God's soldier-saints, who do not fear the soils of struggle, gleam with a higher, intenser purity. "His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns, And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean." These soldiers in heaven have their representatives in earth, and Henry was not one of these. Zeal must come before charity, and then when charity comes it will appear as a self-denial.* But Henry knows nothing of zeal, and he is amiable, not charitable.

There is something of irony in the scene with which the second part of Henry VI opens. Suffolk, the Lancelet of this tragedy, has brought from France the Princess

* J. H. Newman. Verses on Various Occasions, p. 60

Margaret, and the joy of the blameless king upon receiving, at the cost of two hard-won provinces, this terrible wife, who will "dandle him like a baby," has in it something pitiable, something pathetic, and something ludicrous. The relations of the King to Margaret throughout the play are delicately and profoundly conceived. He clings to her as to something stronger than himself; he dreads her as a boy might dread some formidable master.

Exeter Here comes the Queen, whose looks betray her anger
 I'll steal away
Henry And so will I.

Yet through his own freedom from passion, he derives a sense of superiority to his wife, and after she has dashed him all over with the spray of her violent anger and her scorn, Henry may be seen mildly wiping away the drops, insufferably placable, offering excuses for the vituperation and the insults which he has received.

Poor Queen, how love to me and to her son
 Hath made her break out into terms of rage.

Among his "wolfish Earls" Henry is in constant terror, not of being himself torn to pieces, but of then flying at one another's throats. Violent scenes, disturbing the cloistral peace which it would please him to see reign throughout the universe, are hateful and terrible to Henry. He rides out hawking with his Queen and Suffolk, the Cardinal and Gloucester, some of the riders hardly able for an hour to conceal their emulation and their hate. Henry takes a languid interest in the sport, but

all occasions supply food for his contemplative piety, he suffers from a certain incontinence of devout feeling, and now the falcons set him moralising

But what a point, my lord, your falcon made,
And what a pitch she flew above the rest !
To see how God in all his creatures works !

A moment after, and the peers, with Margaret among them, are bandying furious words. Henry's anguish is extreme, but he hopes that something may be done by a few moral reflections suitable to the occasion

I pr'ythee, peace,
Good Queen, and whet not on these furious peers,
For blessed are the peacemakers on earth
Cardinal Let me be blessed for the peace I make
Against this proud Protector with my sword

The angry colloquy is presently silenced by the cry, "A miracle ! a miracle !" and the impostor Simcox and his wife appear. Henry, with his fatuous proclivity towards the edifying, rejoices in this manifestation of God's grace in the restoration to sight of a man born blind.

Great is his comfort in this earthly vale,
Although by his sight his sin be multiplied ,

(That is to say, "If we had the good fortune to be deprived of all our senses and appetites, we should have a fair chance of being quite spotless, yet let us thank God for his mysterious goodness to this man !") And once more, when the Protector, by a slight exercise of shrewdness and common sense, has unmasked the rogue, and has had him whipt, extreme is the anguish of the King

K Hen O God ! seest Thou this, and bearest so long ?
Queen It made me laugh to see the villain run

But the feeble saint, who is cast down upon the occu-

rence of a piece of vulgar knavery, can himself abandon to butchers the noblest life in England. His conscience assures him that Gloster is innocent, he hopes the Duke will be able to clear himself, but Gloster's judges are Suffolk, "with his cloudy brow," sharp Buckingham,

And dogged York, that reaches at the moon

Henry is not equal to confronting such terrible faces as these, and so trusting to God, who will do all things well, he slinks out of the Parliament shedding tears, and leaves Gloster to his fate

My lords, what to your wisdom seemeth best,
Do, or undo, as if ourself were here

When Henry hears that his uncle is dead he swoons, he suspects that the noble old man has been foully dealt with, but judgment belongs to God, possibly his suspicion may be a false one, how terrible if he should sully his purity of heart with a false suspicion, may God forgive him if he do so! And thus humouring his timorous, irritable conscience, Henry is incapable of action, and allows things to take their course

This morbid scrupulosity of conscience which characterizes Henry while he neglects the high duties of his position, sets him speculating uneasily about the validity of his title to the throne—a title which has descended through the great victor of Agincourt from Henry's grandfather. He turns from York to Warwick, from Warwick to Northumberland, uncertain what he ought to think. Clifford boldly cuts the knot, and Henry's courage revives

King Henry, be thy title right or wrong,
Lord Clifford vows to fight in thy defence.

But the king, in the presence of armed force, cannot maintain his resolution, and ends by a compromise, which, upon condition of the forfeiture of his son's rights, will secure peace in *his* days. We sympathize with the indignant Margaret. Yet in Henry's conduct there has been no active selfishness, he has only accepted peace at the price required.

Between York on the one hand, and York's instrument, Jack Cade, on the other, the unhappy king is hard set. Not that it is of himself he chiefly thinks, he suffers on account of the rebels as much as on his own account. He will parley with Cade, still better, he will send "some holy bishop" to entreat with the rebels. York, meanwhile, is approaching, and demands that the king's adviser, Somerset, be removed. Henry, with placid acquiescence, sees Somerset prepared to sacrifice himself, and despatches Buckingham to confer in gentle language with his antagonist. At least the virtue to refrain from disguising, as John disguised, under high-sounding words, the abjectness of his state belongs to Henry.

I pray thee, Buckingham, go and meet him,
And ask him what's the reason of these arms
Tell him I'll send Duke Edmund to the Tower,
And, Somerset, we will commit thee hither
Until his army be dismissed from him.

Som My lord,

I'll yield myself to prison willingly,
Or unto death, to do my country good

K Hen In any case be not too rough in terms,
For he is fierce, and cannot brook hard language

Buck I will, my lord, and doubt not so to deal
As all things shall redound unto your good

K Hen Come, wife, let's in and learn to govern better,
For yet may England curse my wretched reign

At length the wretched reign approaches its end Henry has longed to be a subject, and he is such for some short time before his death From the battle in which Richard, blood-hound-wise, is pursuing Clifford, Henry withdraws, and, seating himself upon a mole-hill, meditates on the happy life of shepherd-swains, and prays that to whom God wills the victory may fall He mildly* begs the fugitives to take him along with them

Nay, take me with thee, good sweet Exeter ,
Not that I fear to stay, but love to go
Whither the queen intends

When the keepers make him their prisoner, Henry is sincerely concerned about the purity of conscience of his captors He enquires, with unfeigned and disinterested anxiety, whether they have taken an oath of allegiance to him At all events he will not now command them to release him, and so they cannot offend His own fate does not concern him, he wears his crown *Content*, and he is sure that the new king will execute neither more nor less than God wills

In prison Henry at last is really happy, now he is responsible for nothing, he enjoys for the first time tranquil solitude, he is a bird who sings in his cage His latter days he will spend, to the rebuke of sin and the praise of his creator, in devotion Henry's equanimity is not of the highest kind, he is incapable of commotion His peace is not that which underlies wholesome agitation, a peace which passes understanding "Quietness is a grace, not in itself, only when it is grafted on the stem of faith, zeal, self-abasement, and diligence"* If Henry had known

* I H Newman Parochial and Plain Sermons, vol v, p 71

the nobleness of true kingship, his content in prison might be admirable, as it is, the beauty of that content does not strike us as of a rich or vivid kind. But the end is come, and that is a gain. Henry has yielded to the house of York, and the evil time is growing shorter. The words of the great Duke of York are confirmed by our sense of fact and right.

King did I call thee? nay, thou art not king

Give place, by heaven thou shalt rule no more
O'er him whom heaven created for thy ruler *

III

Certain qualities which make it unique among the dramas of Shakspeare characterize the play of King Richard III. Its manner of conceiving and presenting character has a certain resemblance, not elsewhere to be found in Shakspeare's writings, to the ideal manner of Marlowe. As in the plays of Marlowe, there is here one dominant figure distinguished by a few strongly marked and inordinately developed qualities. There is in the

* Without entering into the controversy as to the authorship of the "First Part of the Contention," and "The True Tragedie" (the old plays corresponding to the second and third parts of King Henry VI.), it may be instructive to mention how authorities are divided. In favour of Shakspeare's authorship of these plays, Johnson, Stevens, Knight, Schlegel, Tieck, Ulrich, Delius, Oechelhäuser, H. von Friesen. In favour of Greene's or Marlowe's authorship, Malone, Collier, Dyce, Courtenay, Gervinus, Kreyssig and the French critics. Clark and Wright, Halliwell, Lloyd, and others believe that a portion of Shakspeare's work may be found in these old plays. See the note from which I partly obtain this list of authorities in *Jahrbuch der Deutschen Shakespeare Gesellschaft*, vol. III, p. 42. See also in vol. I. the article by Ulrich, "Christopher Marlowe und Shakespeares Verhältniss zu ihm." See the previous notes, p. 56, and pp. 97, 98, for the opinions of Mr Grant White, and Miss J. Lee.

characterization no mystery, but much of a dæmonic intensity. Certain passages are entirely in the lyrical-dramatic style, an emotion which is one and the same, occupying at the same moment two or three of the personages, and obtaining utterance through them almost simultaneously, or in immediate succession, as a musical motive is interpreted by an orchestra, or taken up singly by successive instruments —

Q. Eliz Was never widow had so dear a loss !
Children Were never orphans had so dear a loss !
Duchess Was never mother had so dear a loss !
 Alas ! I am the mother of these griefs

Mere verisimilitude in the play of King Richard III becomes at times subordinate to effects of symphonic orchestration, or of statuesque composition. There is a Blake-like terror and beauty in the scene in which the three women,—queens and a duchess,—seat themselves upon the ground in their desolation and despair, and cry aloud in utter anguish of spirit. First by the mother of two kings, then by Edward's widow, last by the terrible Medusa-like Queen Margaret, the same attitude is assumed, and the same grief is poured forth. Misery has made them indifferent to all ceremony of queenship, and for a time to their private differences, they are seated, a rigid yet tumultuously passionate group, in the majesty of mere womanhood and supreme calamity. Readers acquainted with Blake's illustrations to the Book of Job will remember what effects, sublime and appalling, the artist produces by animating a group of figures with one common passion, which spontaneously produces in each individual the same extravagant movement of head and limbs

The dæmonic intensity which distinguishes the play proceeds from the character of Richard, as from its source and centre. As with the chief personages of Marlowe's plays, so Richard in this play rather occupies the imagination by audacity and force, than insinuates himself through some subtle solvent, some magic and mystery of art. His character does not grow upon us, from the first it is complete. We are not curious to discover what Richard is, as we are curious to come into presence of the soul of Hamlet. We are in no doubt about Richard, but it yields us a strong sensation to observe him in various circumstances and situations, we are roused and animated by the presence of almost superhuman energy and power, even though that power and that energy be malign.

Coleridge has said of Richard that pride of intellect is his characteristic. This is true, but his dominant characteristic is not intellectual, it is rather a dæmonic energy of will. The same cause which produces tempest and shipwreck produces Richard, he is a fierce elemental power raging through the world, but this elemental power is concentrated in a human will. The need of action is with Richard an appetite to which all the other appetites are subordinate. He requires space in the world to bustle in, his will must wreak itself on men and things. All that is done in the play proceeds from Richard, there is, as has been observed by Mr Hudson, no interaction. "The drama is not so much a composition of co-operative characters, mutually developing and developed, as the prolonged yet hurried outcome of a single character, to which the other persons serve

but as exponents and conductors, as if he were a volume of electricity disclosing himself by means of others, and quenching their active powers in the very process of doing so ”*

Richard, with his distorted and withered body, his arm shrunk like “a blasted sapling,” is yet a sublime figure by virtue of his energy of will and tremendous power of intellect. All obstacles give way before him,—the courage of men, and the bitter animosity of women. And Richard has a passionate scorn of men, because they are weaker and more obtuse than he, the deformed outcast of nature. He practises hypocrisy not merely for the sake of success, but because his hypocrisy is a cynical jest, or a gross insult to humanity. The Mayor of London has a *bourgeois* veneration for piety and established forms of religion. Richard advances to meet him reading a book of prayers, and supported on each side by a bishop. The grim joke, the contemptuous insult to the citizen faith in church and king, flatters his malignant sense of power. To cheat a gull, a coarse hypocrisy suffices †

Towards his tool Buckingham, when occasion suits, Richard can be frankly contemptuous. Buckingham is unable to keep pace with Richard in his headlong career, he falls behind and is scant of breath.

* H. N. Hudson, *Shakespeare, his Life, Art and Characters*, vol. II, p. 156.

† The plan originates with Buckingham, but Richard plays his part with manifest delight. Shakspeare has no historical authority for the presence of the Bishops. See Skottowe's *Life of Shakspeare*, vol. I, pp. 195-96.

The deep-revolving, witty Buckingham
 No more shall be the neighbour to my counsel,
 Hath he so long held out with me untired
 And stops he now for breath?

The duke, "his other self, his counsel's consistory, his oracle, his prophet," comes before the king claiming the fulfilment of a promise, that he should receive the Earldom of Hereford. Richard becomes suddenly deaf and, contemptuously disregarding the interpellations of Buckingham, continues his talk on indifferent matters. At length he turns to "his other self,"—

Buck My lord!

K. Rich Ay, what's o'clock?

Buck I am thus bold to put your Grace in mind
 Of what you promised me

K. Rich Well, but what's o'clock?

Buck Upon the stroke of ten

K. Rich Well, let it strike

Buck Why let it strike?

K. Rich Because that like a Jack thou keep'st the stroke
 Betwixt thy begging and my meditation
 I am not in the giving vein to-day

Richard's cynicism and insolence have in them a kind of grim mirth, such a *bonhomie* as might be met with among the humourists of Pandemonium. His brutality is a manner of joking with a purpose. When his mother, with Queen Elizabeth, comes by "copious in exclaims," ready to "smother her damned son in the breath of bitter words," the mirthful Richard calls for a flourish of trumpets to drown these shrill female voices

A flourish trumpets! strike alarum, drums!
 Let not the heavens hear these tell-tale women
 Rail on the Lord's anointed, Strike, I say!

On an occasion when hypocrisy is more serviceable

than brutality, Richard kneels to implore his mother's blessing, but has a characteristic word of contemptuous impiety to utter aside

Duchess God bless thee and put meekness in thy breast,
Love, charity, obedience, and true duty

Richard Amen! and make me die a good old man!
That is the butt-end of a mother's blessing,
I marvel that her grace did leave it out

He plays his part before his future wife, the Lady Anne, laying open his breast to the sword's point with a malicious confidence. He knows the measure of woman's frailty, and relies on the spiritual force of his audacity and dissimulation to subdue the weak hand, which tries to lift the sword. With no friends to back his suit, with nothing but "the plain devil, and dissembling looks," he wins his bride. The hideous irony of such a courtship, the mockery it implies of human love, is enough to make a man "your only jigmaker," and sends Richard's blood dancing along his veins.

While Richard is plotting for the crown, Lord Hastings threatens to prove an obstacle in the way. What is to be done? Buckingham is dubious and tentative

Now, my lord, what shall we do, if we perceive
Lord Hastings will not yield to our complots?

With sharp detonation, quickly begun and quickly over, Richard's answer is discharged, "Chop off his head, man." There can be no beginning, middle, or end to a deed so simple and so summary. Presently Hastings making sundry small assignations for future days and weeks, goes, a murdered man, to the conference at the Tower. Richard, whose startling figure emerges from the background through-

out the play with small regard for verisimilitude and always at the most effective moment, is suddenly on the spot, just as Hastings is about to give his voice in the conference as though he were the representative of the absent Duke. Richard is prepared, when the opportune instant has arrived, to spring a mine under Hastings' feet. But meanwhile a matter of equal importance concerns him,—my Lord of Ely's strawberries: the flavour of Holborn strawberries is exquisite, and the fruit must be sent for. Richard's desire to appear disengaged from sinister thought is less important to note than Richard's need of indulging a cynical contempt of human life. The explosion takes place, Hastings is seized, and the delicacies are reserved until the head of Richard's enemy is off. There is a wantonness of *drablerie* in this incident.

Talk'st thou to me of *ifs*? Thou art a traitor—
Off with his head! Now by Saint Paul I swear
I will not dine until I see the same *

The fiery energy of Richard is at its simplest, unmingled with irony or dissimulation in great days of military movement and of battle. Then the force within him expends itself in a paroxysm which has all the intensity of ungovernable spasmodic action, and which is yet organised and controlled by his intellect. Then he is engaged at his truest devotions, and numbers his Ave-Maries, not with beads but with ringing strokes upon the helmets of his foes †. He is inspired with

* This scene, including the incident of the dish of strawberries, is from Sir T. More's history. See Courtney's Commentaries on Shakspeare, vol. II., pp. 84-87.

† 3 Henry VI., Act II., Scene I.

"the spleen of fiery dragons," "a thousand hearts are great within his bosom" On the eve of the battle of Bosworth field, Richard, with uncontrollable eagerness, urges his enquiry into the minutiae of preparation which may ensure success He lacks his usual alacrity of spirit, yet a dozen subalterns would hardly suffice to receive the orders which he rapidly enunciates He is upon the wing of "fiery expedition"

I will not sup to-night Give me some ink and paper
What, is my beaver easier than it was?
And all my armour laid within my tent?

Catesby It is, my liege, and all things are in readiness

K Rich Good Norfolk, hie thee to thy charge,
Use careful watch, choose trusty sentinels

Norfolk I go, my lord

K Rich Stir with the lark to-morrow, gentle Norfolk

Norfolk I warrant you, my lord

K Rich Catesby!

Catesby My Lord?

K Rich Send out a pursuivant at arms
To Stanley's regiment, bid him bring his power
Before sun-rising, lest his son George fall
Into the blind cave of eternal night
Fill me a bowl of wine Give me a watch

[*Exit Catesby*]

Saddle White Surrey for the field to-morrow
Look that my staves be sound, and not too heavy,
Ratcliff!

And learning from Ratcliff, that Northumberland and Surrey are alert, giving his last direction that his attendant should return at midnight to help him to arm, King Richard retires into his tent.

In all his military movements, as in the whole of Richard's career, there is something else than self-seeking It is true that Richard, like Ed-

mund, like Iago, is solitary, he has no friend, no brother, "I am myself alone," and all that Richard achieves tends to his own supremacy. Nevertheless, the central characteristic of Richard is not self-seeking or ambition. It is the necessity of releasing and letting loose upon the world the force within him (mere force in which there is nothing moral), the necessity of deploying before himself and others the terrible resources of his will. One human tie Shakspeare attributes to Richard, contemptuous to his mother, indifferent to the life or death of Clarence and Edward, except as their life or death may serve his own attempt upon the crown, cynically loveless towards his feeble and unhappy wife, Richard admires with an enthusiastic admiration his great father

Methinks 'tis prize enough to be his son.

And the memory of his father supplies him with a family pride which, however, does not imply attachment or loyalty to any member of his house

But I was born so high,
Our aery buideth in the cedar's top,
And dallies with the wind and scorns the sun

History supplied Shakspeare with the figure of his Richard. He has been accused of darkening the colours, and exaggerating the deformity of the character of the historical Richard found in More and Holinshed. The fact is precisely the contrary. The mythic Richard of the historians (and there must have been some appalling fact to originate such a myth) is made somewhat less grim and bloody by the dramatist*. Essentially, how-

* See the detailed study of this play by W. Oechelhäuser in *Jahrbuch der Deutschen Shakespeare Gesellschaft*, vol. III. pp. 37-39, and

ever, Shakspeare's Richard is of the diabolical (something more dreadful than the criminal) class. He is not weak because he is single-hearted in his devotion to evil. Richard does not serve two masters. He is not like John, a dastardly criminal, he is not like Macbeth, joyless and faithless because he has deserted loyalty and honour. He has a fierce joy, and he is an intense believer,—in the creed of hell. And therefore he is strong. He inverts the moral order of things, and tries to live in this inverted system. He does not succeed, he dashes himself to pieces against the laws of the world which he has outraged. Yet, while John is wholly despicable, we cannot refrain from yielding a certain tribute of admiration to the bolder malefactor, who ventures on the daring experiment of choosing evil for his good.

Such an experiment, Shakspeare declares emphatically, as experience and history declare, must in the end fail. The ghosts of the usurper's victims rise between the camps, and are to Richard the Erinyes, to Richmond inspirers of hope and victorious courage. At length Richard trembles on the brink of annihilation, trembles over the loveless gulf —

I shall despair, there is no creature loves me,
And if I die, no soul shall pity me

pp 47, 53. Holinshed's treatment of the character of Richard is hardly in harmony with itself. From the death of Edward IV onwards the Richard of Holinshed resembles Shakspeare's Richard, but possesses fainter traces of humanity. "Wenn hiernach also thatsächlich zwei Holinshed'sche Versionen des Charakters und der Handlungen Richard's vorliegen, so hat Shakespeare allerdings die auf More basirte, also die schwarzere gewählt, über diese ist er aber nicht, wie so vielfach behauptet wird, hinausgegangen, sondern er hat sie sogar gemildert, hat die Fäden, welche das Ungeheuer noch mit der Menschheit verknüpfen, verstärkt, statt sie ganz zu lösen."

But the stir of battle restores him to resolute thoughts, "Come, bustle, bustle, caparison my horse," and he dies in a fierce paroxysm of action. Richmond conquers, and he conquers expressly as the champion and representative of the moral order of the world, which Richard had endeavoured to set aside.

O Thou, whose captain I account myself,
 Look on my forces with a gracious eye,
 Put in their hands thy braving irons of wrath,
 That they may crush down with a heavy fall
 The usurping helmets of our adversaries!
 Make us thy ministers of chastisement,
 That we may praise thee in thy victory

The female figures of this play,—Queen Elizabeth, Queen Margaret, the Duchess of York, the Lady Anne, and with these the women of Shakspeare's other historical plays, would form an interesting subject for a separate study. The women of the histories do not attain the

best happiness of women. In the rough struggle of interests, of parties, of nations, they are defrauded of their joy, and of its objects. Like Constance, like Elizabeth, like Margaret, like the Queen of the Second Richard, like Katharine of Arragon, they mourn some the loss of children, some of husbands, some of brothers, and all of love. Or else, like Harry Percy's wife (who also lives to lament her husband's death, and to tremble for her father's fate),* they are the wives of men of action to whom they are dear, but "in sort or limitation," dwelling but in the suburbs of their husbands' good-pleasure.

To keep with you at meals, comfort your bed,
 And talk with you sometimes

* See the pathetic scene, 2 Henry IV. Act II, Scene 3

The wooing of the French Katharine by King Henry V is business-like, and soundly affectionate, but by no means of the kind which is most satisfying to the heart of a sensitive or ardent woman. That Shakspeare himself loved in another fashion than that of Hotspur or Henry might be inferred, if no other sufficient evidence were forthcoming, from the admirable mockery of the love given by men of letters, and men of imagination—poets in chief—which he puts into Henry's mouth "And while thou livest, dear Kate, take a fellow of plain and uncoined constancy, for he perforce must do thee right, because he hath not the gift to woo in other places, for these fellows of infinite tongue, that can rhyme themselves into ladies' favours, they do always reason themselves out again." Was this a skit by Shakspeare against himself, or against an interpretation of himself for which he perceived there was a good deal to be said, from a point of view other than his own? While the poet was buying up land near Stratford, he could describe his courtier Osric as "very spacious in the possession of dirt." Is this a piece of irony similar in kind?

The figure of Queen Margaret is painfully persistent upon the mind's eye, and tyrannises, almost as much as the figure of King Richard himself, over the imagination. "Although banished upon pain of death, she returns to England to assist at the intestine conflicts of the House of York. Shakspeare personifies in her the ancient Nemesis, he gives her more than human proportions, and represents her as a sort of supernatural apparition. She penetrates freely into the palace of Edward IV, she

there breathes forth her hatred in presence of the family of York, and its courtier attendants. No one dreams of arresting her, although she is an exiled woman, and she goes forth, meeting no obstacle, as she had entered. The same magic ring, which on the first occasion opened the doors of the royal mansion, opens them for her once again, when Edward IV is dead, and his sons have been assassinated in the Tower by the order of Richard. She came, the first time, to curse her enemies, she comes now to gather the fruits of her malediction. Like an avenging Fury, or the classical Fate, she has announced to each his doom”*

The play must not be dismissed without one word spoken of King Edward IV. He did not interest the imagination of Shakspeare. Edward is the self-indulgent, luxurious king. The one thing which Shakspeare cared to say about him was, that his pleasant delusion of peace-making shortly before his death, was a poor and insufficient compensation for a life spent in ease and luxury rather than in laying the hard and strong bases of a substantial peace. A few soft words, and placing of hands in hands will not repair the ravage of fierce years, and the decay of sound human bonds during soft, effeminate years. Just as the peace-making is perfect, Richard is present on the scene —

There wanteth now our brother Gloster here
To make the blessed period of our peace

And Gloster stands before the dying king to announce that Clarence lies murdered in the Tower. This is

* A Mézières, Shakspeare, ses Œuvres et ses Critiques, p 139

Shakspeare's comment upon and condemnation of the self-indulgent King *

IV.

The play of King Richard II possesses none of the titanic stormy force which breathes through King Richard III, but in delicate cunning in the rendering of character it excels the more popular play. The two principal figures in King Richard II, that of the king who fell, and that of the king who rose—the usurping Bolingbroke—grow before us insensibly through a series of fine and characteristic strokes. They do not, like the figures in King Richard III, forcibly possess themselves of our imagination, but engage it before it is aware, and by degrees advance stronger claims upon us, and make good those claims. It will be worth while to try to ascertain what Shakspeare looked upon as most significant in the characters of these two royal persons,—the weak king who could not rule, and the strong king who pressed him from his place.

There is a condition of the intellect which we describe by the word "boyishness." The mind in the boyish stage of growth "has no discriminating convictions, and no grasp of consequences." It has not as yet got hold of realities, it is "merely dazzled by phenomena instead of perceiving things as they are." The talk of a person

* Otto Ludwig notices the ideal treatment of time in *King Richard III*. But does it differ from the treatment of time in other historical plays of Shakspeare? "Wie in keinem anderen seiner Stücke die Begebenheiten gewaltsamer zusammengedrückt sind, so ist auch in keinem anderen die Zeit so ideal behandelt als hier. Hier giebt es kein Gestern, kein Morgen, keine Uhr, und keinen Kalender"—Shakspeare Studien, pp 450, 451

who remains in this sense boyish is often clever, but it is unreal, now he will say brilliant things upon this side of a question, and now upon the opposite side. He has no consistency of view. He is wanting as yet in seriousness of intellect, in the adult mind*. Now if we extend this characteristic of boyishness, from the intellect to the entire character, we may understand much of what Shakspeare meant to represent in the person of Richard II. Not alone his intellect, but his feelings, live in the world of phenomena, and altogether fail to lay hold of things as they are; they have no consistency and no continuity. His will is entirely unformed, it possesses no authority and no executive power, he is at the mercy of every chance impulse and transitory mood. He has a kind of artistic relation to life, without being an artist. An artist in life seizes upon the stuff of circumstance, and with strenuous will, and strong creative power, shapes some new and noble form of human existence.

Richard, to whom all things are unreal, has a fine feeling for "situations." Without true kingly strength or dignity, he has a fine feeling for the royal situation. Without any making real to himself what God or what death is, he can put himself, if need be, in the appropriate attitude towards God and towards death. Instead of comprehending things as they are, and achieving heroic deeds, he satiates his heart with the grace, the tenderness, the beauty, or the pathos of situations. Life is to Richard a show, a succession of images, and to put himself into accord with the æsthetic requirements of his position is Richard's first necessity. He is equal

* John Henry Newman *Idea of a University*—Preface.

playing any part gracefully which he is called upon by circumstances to enact. But when he has exhausted the æsthetic satisfaction to be derived from the situations of his life, he is left with nothing further to do. He is an amateur in living, not an artist."

Nothing had disturbed the graceful dream of Richard's adolescence. The son of the Black Prince, beautiful in face and form, though now past his youth, a king since boyhood, he has 'known' no antagonism of men or circumstance which might arouse the will. He has an indescribable charm of person and presence, Hotspur remembers him as "Richard, that sweet, lovely rose." But a king who rules a discontented people and turbulent nobles needs to be something more than a beautiful blossoming flower. Richard has abandoned his nature to self-indulgence, and therefore the world becomes to him more unreal than ever. He has been surrounded by flatterers, who helped to make his atmosphere a luminous mist, through which the facts of life appeared with all their ragged outlines smoothed away. In the first scene of the play he enacts the part of a king with a fine show of dignity, his bearing is splendid and irreproachable. Mowbray is obstinate, and will not throw down the gage of Bolingbroke, Richard exclaims —

Rage must be withstood

• Give me his gage lions make leopards tame

* "Die guten Eigenschaften seiner Natur werden ihm unnütz, ja gefährlich, er gewährt das erschütternde Schauspiel eines beispiellosen, geistigen und gemüthlichen nicht weniger als ausserlichen Bankerotts in Folge des einen Umstandes—dass die Natur ihn mit einem Dilettantencharacter auf eine Stelle berufen, die mehr als jede andere einen Künstler fordert." Kreyssig, *Vorlesungen über Shakespeare* (ed 1874), vol 1, p 189. See what follows on Richard's "Dilettantismus."

But Mowbray retains the gage “We were not born to sue, but to command,” declares Richard with royal majesty, yet he admits that to command exceeds his power. What of that? Has not Richard borne himself splendidly, and uttered himself in a royal metaphor “Lions make leopards tame?”

At this very moment Bolingbroke, with eye set upon his purpose afar off, has resolutely taken the first step towards attaining it. The challenge of Mowbray conceals a deeper purpose. So little does Bolingbroke really feel of hostility to his antagonist, that one of his first acts, as soon as he is in a position to act with authority, is to declare Mowbray’s repeal.* But to stand forward as champion of the wrongs of England, to make himself the eminent justiciary by right of nature, this is the initial step towards future kingship, and Bolingbroke perceives clearly that the fact of Gloster’s death may serve as fulcrum for the lever which is to shake the throne of England. Nor is the King quite insensible of the tendency of his cousin’s action. Already he begins to quail before his bold antagonist :

How high a pitch his resolution soars

Richard tries gracefully to conceal his discomposure, and to deceive Bolingbroke, but he is not, like Richard the hunchback, a daring and efficient hypocrite. He betrays his weakness and his distrust, administering to the two men decreed to exile an oath which pledges them never to

* Kreyssig suggests that this piece of magnanimity was really a piece of fine hypocrisy, Bolingbroke was perhaps aware of Norfolk’s death at the time that he gave order for his repeal.

reconcile themselves in their banishment, and never to plot against the king

Bohngbroke accepts his exile, parts from the English crowd with an air of gracious, condescending familiarity, which flatters (whereas Richard's undignified familiarity only displeases),* and bids farewell to his country as a son bids farewell to the mother with whom his natural loyalty remains, and whom, in due time, he will see again. John of Gaunt is lying on his death-bed. The last of the great race of the time of Edward III, no English spirit will breathe such patriotism as his until the days of Agincourt. With the prophetic inspiration of a dying man he dares to warn his grand-nephew, and to rebuke him for his treason against the ancient honour of England. Richard, who, with his characteristic sensibility of a superficial kind, turns pale as he listens, recovers himself by a transition from overawed alarm to boyish insolence. The white-haired warrior, now a prophet, who lies dying before him, is

A lunatic, lean-witted fool,
Presuming on an ague's privilege

who dares with a frozen admonition to make pale the royal cheek of Richard. The facts are very disagreeable,

- * The skipping King, he ambled up and down
With shallow jesters and rash bavin wits,
Soon kindled and soon burnt, carded his state,
Mingled his royalty with capering fools,

Grew a companion to the common streets

Thus Henry IV describes his predecessor as a lesson to Prince Henry, whose familiarity with his future subjects is neither in his father's manner nor in that of Richard II

and why should a king admit into his consciousness an ugly or disagreeable fact?

By and by, being informed that John of Gaunt is dead, Richard has the most graceful and appropriate word ready for so solemn an occasion

The ripest fruit first falls, and so doth he,
His time is spent, our pilgrimage must be

In which pilgrimage the first step is to seize upon"

The plate, coin, revenues, and moveables,
Whereof our uncle Gaunt did stand possessed

Even York, the temporising York, who would fain be all things to all men if by any means he might save himself, is amazed and ventures to remonstrate against the criminal folly of this act. But Richard, like all self-indulgent natures, has only a half belief in any possible future, he chooses to make the present time easy, and let the future provide for itself, he has been living upon chances too long, he has too long been mortgaging the health of to-morrow for the pleasure of to-day.

Think what you will, we seize into our hands
His plate, his goods, his money, and his lands

But now the tempest begins to sing Bolingbroke (before he can possibly have heard of his father's death and the seizure by Richard of his own rights and royalties) has equipped an expedition, and is about to land upon the English coast. The King makes a hasty return from his "military promenade" in Ireland*. The first words of each, as he touches his native soil, are characteristic, and were, doubtless, placed by Shakspeare in

designed contrast “*How far is it, my lord, to Berkeley now?*” The banished man has no tender phrases to bestow upon English earth, now that he sets foot upon it once more. All his faculties are firm set, and bent upon achievement. But Richard, who has been absent for a few days in Ireland, enters with all possible zeal into the sentiment of his situation

I weep for joy
To stand upon my kingdom once again
Dear earth, I do salute thee with my hand,
Though rebels wound thee with their horses’ hoofs,
As a long-parted mother with her child
Plays fondly with her tears and smiles in meeting,
So weeping, smiling, greet I thee, my earth,
And do thee favours with my royal hands

Which sentimental favours form a graceful incident in the play of Richard’s life, but can hardly compensate the want of true and manly patriotism. This same earth which Richard caressed with extravagant sensibility was the England which John of Gaunt with strong enthusiasm had apostrophised

This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England,
This nurse, this teeming womb of royal kings,
Fear’d by their breed, and famous for their birth,
Renowned for their deeds

It was the England which Richard had alienated from himself and leased out “like to a tenement or pelting farm.” What of that, however? Did not Richard address his England with phrases full of tender sensibility, and render her mockery favours with his royal hands?

Bolingbroke has already gained the support of the Welsh. Richard has upon his side powers higher than natural flesh and blood. Shall he not rise like the sun

in the eastern sky, and with the majesty of his royal apparition scare away the treasons of the night? Is he not the anointed deputy of God?

Not all the water in the rough rude sea
Can wash the balm from an anointed king
The breath of worldly men cannot depose
The deputy elected by the Lord

Yes; he will rely on God, it is devout, it is not laborious For every armed man who fights for Bolingbroke,

God for his Richard hath in heavenly pay
A glorious angel.

And at this moment Salisbury enters to announce the revolt of Wales Richard has been slack in action, and arrived a day too late. Remorseless comment upon the rhetorical piety of the King! A company of angels fight upon his side, true, but the sturdy Welshmen stand for Bolingbroke! He is the deputy elected by the Lord, but the Lord's deputy has arrived a day too late!

And now Richard alternates between abject despondency (relieved by accepting all the æsthetic satisfaction derivable from the situation of vanquished king) and an airy, unreal confidence There is in Richard, as Coleridge has finely observed, "a constant overflow of emotions from a total incapability of controlling them, and thence a waste of that energy, which should have been reserved for actions, in the passion and effort of mere resolves and menaces The consequence is moral exhaustion and rapid alternations of unmanly despair and ungrounded hope, every feeling being abandoned for its direct opposite upon the pressure of external accident" *

A certain unreality infects every motion of Richard, his feelings are but the shadows of true feeling. Now he will be great and a king, now what matters it to lose a kingdom? If Bolingbroke and he alike serve God, Bolingbroke can be no more than his fellow-servant. Now he plays the wanton with his pride, and now with his misery

Of comfort no man speak
Let's talk of graves, of worms and epitaphs,

For God's sake, let us sit upon the ground
And tell sad stories of the death of kings

At one moment he pictures God mustering armies of pestilence in his clouds to strike the usurper and his descendants, in the next he yields to Bolingbroke's demands, and welcomes his "right noble cousin". He is proud, and he is pious, he is courageous and cowardly, and pride and piety, cowardice and courage, are all the passions of a dream.

Yet Shakspeare has thrown over the figure of Richard a certain atmosphere of charm. If only the world were not a real world, to which serious hearts are due, we could find in Richard some wavering, vague attraction. There is a certain wistfulness about him, without any genuine kingly power, he has a feeling for what kingly power must be, without any veritable religion, he has a pale shadow of religiosity. And few of us have ourselves wholly escaped from unreality. "It takes a long time really to feel and understand things as they are, we learn to do so only gradually."* Into what glim-

* John H. Newman. *Parochial and Plain Sermons* "Unreal Words," vol v, p 43

mering Jumbo will such a soul as that of Richard pass when the breath leaves the body? The pains of hell and the joys of heaven belong to those who have serious hearts. Richard has been a graceful phantom. Is there some tenuous, unsubstantial world of spirits reserved for the sentimentalist, the dreamer, and the dilettante? Richard is, as it were, fading out of existence. Bolingbroke seems not only to have robbed him of his authority, but to have encroached upon his very personality, and to have usurped his understanding and his will. Richard is discovering that he is no more than a shadow, but the discovery itself has something unreal and shadowy about it. Is not some such fact as this symbolised by the incident of the mirror? Before he quite ceases to be king, Richard, with his taste for "pseudo-poetic pathos," would once more look upon the image of his face, and see what wrinkles have been traced upon it by sorrow. And Bolingbroke, suppressing his inward feeling of disdain, directs that the mirror be brought. Richard gazes against it, and finds that sorrow has wrought no change upon the beautiful lips and forehead. And then exclaiming,

A brittle glory shineth in this face,
As brittle as the glory is the face,

he dashes the glass against the ground

For there it is crack'd in a hundred shivers.
Mark, silent King, the moral of this sport,
How soon my sorrow hath destroy'd my face

Boling The shadow of your sorrow hath destroy'd
The shadow of your face

Rich Say that again

The shadow of my sorrow 'thou'lt see

Does Richard, as Professor Flathe (contemptuously dismissing the criticisms of Gervinus and of Kreyssig) maintains, rise morally from his humiliation as a king? Is he heartily sorry for his misdoings? While drinking the wine and eating the bread of sorrow, does he truly and earnestly repent, and intend to lead a new life? The habit of his nature is not so quickly unlearned. Richard in prison remains the same person as Richard on the throne. Calamity is no more real to him now than prosperity had been in brighter days. The soliloquy of Richard in Pomfret Castle (*Act v, Scene 5*) might almost be transferred, as far as tone and manner are concerned, to one other personage in Shakspeare's plays—to Jacques. The curious intellect of Jacques gives him his distinction. He plays his parts for the sake of understanding the world in his way of superficial fool's-wisdom. Richard plays his parts to possess himself of the æsthetic satisfaction of an amateur in life, with a fine feeling for situations. But each lives in the world of shadow, in the world of mockery wisdom, or the world of mockery passion. Mr Hudson is right when he says, "Richard is so steeped in voluptuous habits that he must needs be a voluptuary even in his sorrow, and make a luxury of woe itself, pleasure has so thoroughly mastered his spirit, that he cannot think of bearing pain as a duty or an honour, but merely as a license for the pleasure of maudlin self-compassion, so he hangs over his griefs, hugs them, nurses them, buries himself in them, as if the sweet agony thereof were to him a glad refuge from the stings of self-reproach, or a dear release from the exercise of manly thought."

* Shakspeare his Life, Art and Character, vol. II. p. 55

Yet to the last a little of real love is reserved by one heart or two for the shadowy, attractive Richard, the love of a wife who is filled with a piteous sense of her husband's mental and moral effacement, seeing her "fair rose wither," and the love of a groom whose loyalty to his master is associated with loyalty to his master's horse, roan Barbary. This incident of roan Barbary is an invention of the poet. Did Shakspeare intend only a little bit of helpless pathos? Or is there a touch of hidden irony here? A poor spark of affection remains for Richard, but it has been kindled half by Richard, and half by Richard's horse. The fancy of the fallen king disports itself for the last time, and hangs its latest wreath around this incident. Then suddenly comes the darkness. Suddenly the hectic passion of Richard flares, he snatches an axe from a servant, and deals about him deadly blows. In another moment he is extinct, the graceful futile existence has ceased.

V

Bolingbroke utters few words in the play of Richard II, yet we feel that from the first the chief force centres in him. He possesses every element of power except those which are spontaneous and unconscious. He is dauntless, but his courage is under the control of his judgment, it never becomes a glorious martial rage like that of the Greek Achilles, or like that of the English Henry, Bolingbroke's son. He is ambitious, but his ambition is not an inordinate desire to wreak his will upon the world, and expend a fiery energy like that of Richard III.; it is an ambition which aims at definite ends, and

can be held in reserve until these seem attainable. He is studious to obtain the good graces of nobles and of people, and he succeeds because, wedded to his end, he does not become impatient of the means, but he is wholly lacking in genius of the heart, and therefore he obtains the love of no man. He is indeed formidable, his enemies describe England as

A bleeding land,
Gasping for life under great Bolingbroke,

and he is aware of his strength, but there is in his nature no fund of incalculable strength of which he cannot be aware. All his faculties are well-organized, and help one another, he is embarrassed by no throng of conflicting desires or sympathies. He is resolved to win the throne, and has no personal hostility to the king to divide or waste his energies, only a little of contempt. In the deposition scene he gives as little pain as may be to Richard, he controls and checks Northumberland, who irritates and excites the king by requiring him to read the articles of his accusation. Because Bolingbroke is strong, he is not cruel.* He decides when to augment his power by clemency, and when by severity. Aumerle he can pardon, who will live to fight and fall gallantly for Henry's son at Agincourt. He can dismiss to a dignified retreat the Bishop, who, loyal to the hereditary principle, had pleaded against Henry's title to the throne. But Bushy, Green, and such like caterpillars of the Commonwealth, Henry has sworn to weed and pluck

* Mézières, *Shakspeare ses Œuvres et ses Critiques*, p. 205. Kreyssig, *Vorlesungen über Shakespeare*, vol. 1., p. 194 (ed. 1874).